f (http://facebook.com/wichitamag)   (http://instagram.com/wichitamag)
 (http://twitter.com/wichitamag)   (http://youtube.com/wichitamag)

ARTS

 SUBSCRIBER CONTENT

Kristen Phipps

BY | FEB 12, 2018 | 12:37 PM

SHARE: f (http://www.facebook.com/share.php?u=https://wichitamag.com/content/print/2018/02/kristen-phipps)

 (https://twitter.com/share)

 (mailto:?subject=Kristen Phipps&body=https://wichitamag.com/content/print/2018/02/kristen-phipps)

"Trash," Kristen Phipps, local painter, says laughing as she describes her current body of work. "Trash, because that's what we typically view it as. You know, because people don't really save their tape or don't really save little pieces and I've become really connected with those."

Kristen's paintings are vibrant and interesting, but there is an amount of purpose and thoughtfulness behind each piece that she creates.

"I do work based on dementia and Alzheimer's and degenerative memory diseases and I think those little pieces of trash—you know, when your neurons are no longer firing and can bring those memories back—its kind of like the same thing. I shouldn't say trash because it sounds really negative. But it's my trash. I kind of call them little 'tidbits left behind.' Even just like regular memory cognition, your brain only picks up little pieces and what's going to happen to the other stuff?"

Kristen's grandmother has late-stage Alzheimer's. When Kristen was younger her grandmother took care of her and her brother every summer but over time, the roles switched and Kristen found herself taking care of her grandmother as the disease progressed.

"I think it started as a way to cope? Now, it's wanting to understand and poise the disease and inevitable death in a less terrifying format. Some 80,000 Americans will die from it every year," Kristen says.
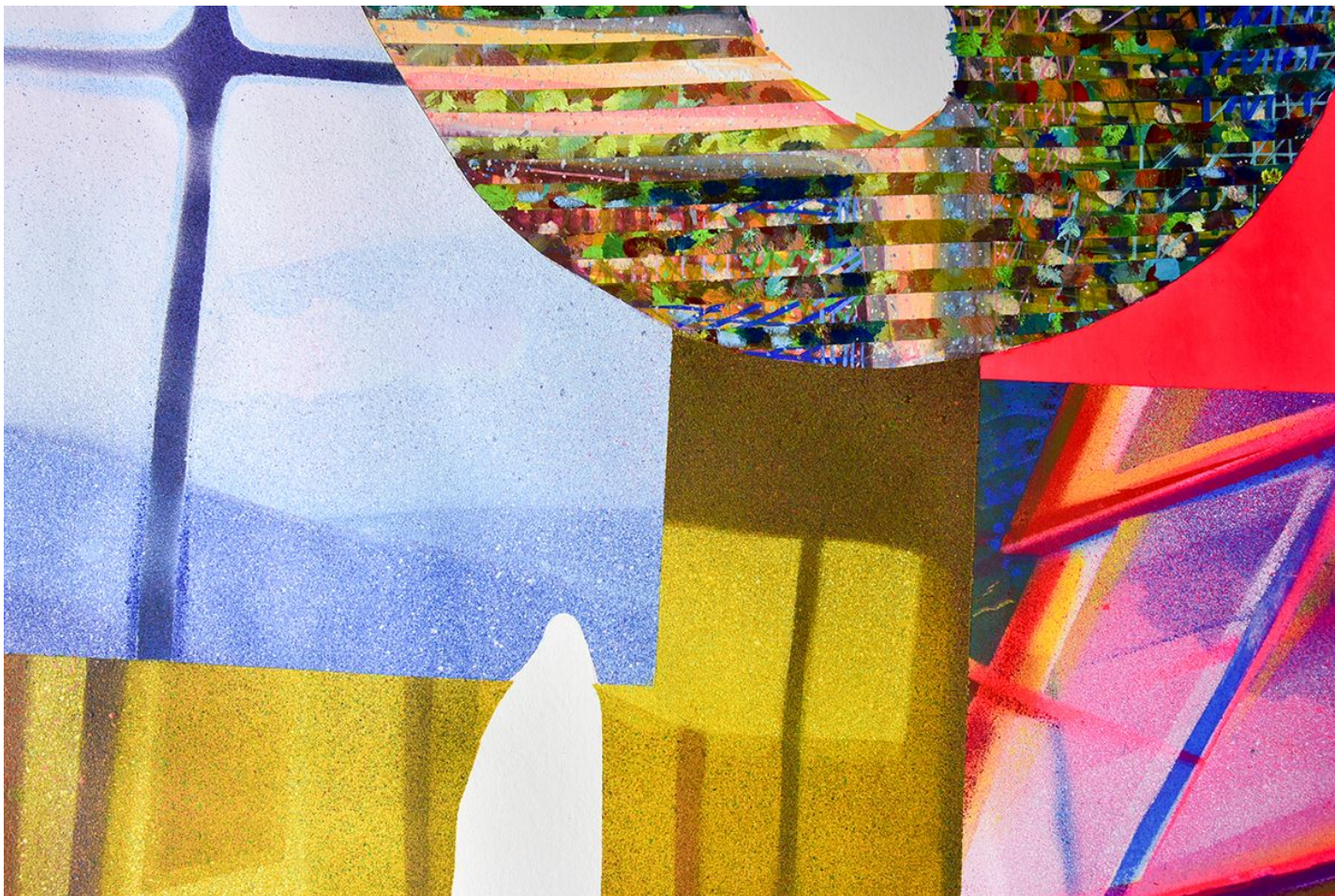
While her work may look abstract, she spends a large amount of time planning, making blueprints and layouts before paint ever touches paper.

Kristen's life after graduating has been speckled with opportunities to travel and create art through residencies. At the beginning of 2017, she was chosen for a residency in Vermont. Since she was heading that way anyway, she decided to explore the east coast, all 5,000 miles, while she was at it.

Kristen's latest adventure was to Alaska, where she spent a month in Rural Dyea, an originating town in the gold rush. She lived in a 350-square-foot cabin alone and spent time painting landscapes and taking bike rides with the dogs that lived on property.

"Residencies have been probably some of my favorite times. While I love my community here, you just get to meet such a diverse range of people, ages, ethnicities, qualities and backgrounds and all these different stories. You make really great connections and friendships," Kristen says. "There's people that I've met a year ago who I could call right now and say, 'hey what are you

doing, let's have a conversation.' You can't beat that kind of connection. I think you can really only get that through travel and residencies and being at the bar at three in the morning and having a weird conversation that has nothing to do with what you guys did that day."

While travel has given Kristen deep and meaningful connections with others, it also inspires her work greatly. Recently, while traveling to Florida, she found herself inspired by Orlando's bright neon signs.

"I like the idea of someone saying 'you need to eat here, right now' in neon pink and its glaring at you. I think I'm going to really start incorporating words and neon words and replicate that."

If you see Kristen around, it's likely she will have with her a backpack full of markers and sketchbooks, which is an extremely important part of her creative process. She draws quickly, wherever she may be, and uses those drawings and bits of information and color choices for her larger paintings.

For the current body of work, Kristen selected a few friends and family to send her a shape, any shape, which she would use to inform her collection of paintings.

"Those paintings kind of started to wraparound them as how they influenced my life so that's been a really fun process to play with and some people took it very seriously," Kristen recalls. "My mom, she sat there and drew a ghost. So I've really taken this adaption of this ghost figure in all my drawings and I've started spray painting this ghost."

Even when she was young, Kristen knew she would be an artist. Art and creating were the only things that really made sense to her in school.

"Getting into high school and realizing, 'wow, I really can't picture myself being a dental hygienist or, you know, anything but being creative,'" Kristen recounts.

"Art is literally everything that you touch. Like this table, someone designed this table and this room, somebody designed this room, and I think people forget that a lot, especially in the education system," Kristen says. "They keep cutting art. They keep cutting writing. They keep cutting music and I'm like, 'what are you supposed to do? How are you supposed to deal with anything if you have no outlet?' I just think there's a lot riding on how we perceive art. I mean it's a whole intellectual language."

And there is a lot riding on how we perceive art and its importance, especially for the kid who can't see themselves doing anything but being creative for a living or for an outlet.

"We are kind of like the tidbits left behind. I feel so weird saying, 'oh this all came full circle...' We

just kind of gotta figure it out and there's ways to do that," Kristen shrugs.

Wichita has been focused on combating this issue and has definitely changed in the last five years and has created unique opportunities for local artists and creative types, according to Kristen.

"In the last two or three years, Wichita just decided, 'we're done messing around and we're going to do this.' And they have."

Add Comment