

LIFE OF THE MIND

The Cosmic and the Ordinary

Lithographer, abstract artist and studio art professor of 20-plus years **Barbara Takenaga** discusses obsession, intention, schmaltz and her dog's rear end. (Adapted from her gallery talk at the opening of the show "Patterning," with Ed Epping, the Alexander Falck Class of 1899 Professor of Art, which ran through Jan. 7 at the Williams College Museum of Art.)



Rosy Pink Spiral, courtesy McKenzie Fine Art, New York

Portrait by Bob Krist

You describe your work as "happy death paintings." What does that mean?

I think obsessive mark-making stemmed from mourning my mother's death. To quote Joan Didion in *The Year of Magical Thinking*: "Grief was passive. . . Mourning, the act of dealing with grief, required attention." There is a lot of repetition in my work, almost like ritual. The happy part comes from a range of thoughts—visual clichés (walk toward the light or don't walk toward the light), beauty, creepiness, the sense of being pulled far away.

You say your work is very process-related and obsessively made.

Do you think it's meditative, like a mantra?

It's working hard and yet not doing anything, like doodling the same thing over and over.

"SOMEONE ONCE WROTE IN THE GALLERY GUEST BOOK THAT I EITHER HAD A LOT OF IDEAS OR JUST ONE, WHICH SAYS IT PRETTY WELL."



Michael Morgenstern

And yes, sometimes it's about a calming kind of spacing out. Sometimes I watch daytime TV and work. Soap operas are notorious for nothing happening for months. Time is slowed down and measured in installments. And other times when I'm working, it's like Tourette syndrome, with lots of repeated obscurities. It's the old Marxist thing: I'm keeping society safe by making art and not becoming a serial killer.

You don't like your students to talk about their artistic intentions when their own work is being critiqued. Why?

I had a teacher who always talked about the "intentional fallacy," that gap between the artist's intent and what the viewer understands. Artists' statements are notoriously cringe-worthy, because they're often addressing big issues that are very close to them. So they end up using words like "spiritual" and "heartfelt," and it sounds awful. A critic can use those same words, and they'd have more authority and less emotion and schmaltz.

In a past *Williams Record* article, you said you were making paintings about your dog's butt. How is that relevant to your work now?

Actually, it was the two spirals of hair on my dog's butt. It could have easily been the spiral on his knee. But it's also that cowlick pattern on the back of a head—little cosmic patterns in everyday, funny settings. The cosmic and the ordinary. ■

A sampling of appearances by Williams professors outside the College's local news area, compiled by the Office of Public Affairs. For a complete list, visit www.williams.edu/admin/news/inthenews/php.

"I hope it will get African Americans of the present day to take a [fresh look at the Civil War](#) in a way that engages them and gets rid of the notion that this was done for [them], or to [them]," says [Charles Dew '58](#), the Ephraim Williams Professor of American History, in the Oct. 7 [Washington Post](#), referring to the inaugural exhibition "In the Cause of Liberty" at the new American Civil War Center in Richmond, Va.

In an article about East German expressionism in the Sept. 29 [Christian Science Monitor](#), [Mark Haxthausen](#), the Faison-Pierson-Stoddard Professor of Art History and chair of the graduate art program, says that an [enigmatic Neo Rauch image](#) "is not about a message. It's about a feeling."

"There is a growing chorus of critics who want intelligence to become more transparent. ... But the [rush toward glasnost is profoundly dangerous](#)," says [Joshua Rovner](#), Stanley Kaplan

Visiting Postdoctoral Fellow in political science and leadership studies, in a Sept. 28 [Boston Globe](#) Op-ed piece about the politics of intelligence reports.

"You can't look at those posters of the films in those great gold frames and not see the [ambitions of the filmmakers to make great art with a capital A](#)," says [Nancy Mowll Mathews](#), Eugenie Prendergast Senior Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art, in a Nov. 8 [Los Angeles Times](#) review of the exhibition "Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880-1910," which opened at NYU in the fall after debuting at Williams.

John Mark Karr's [false confession](#) to the murder of 6-year-old JonBenet Ramsey prompted a slew of national newspaper articles in August quoting [Saul Kassin](#), the Massachusetts Professor of Psychology, and [Alan Hirsch](#), visiting assistant professor of legal studies, on why people take credit for crimes they didn't commit.

Though economists are convinced that "[annuitization is the way to go](#)" to provide lifetime income security, many consumers opt for the lump sum of money provided by deferred annuities, according to [William Gentry](#), associate professor of economics, in a Nov. 1 [Sun-Sentinel](#) of South Florida article.

IN THE NEWS



Rick Reinhard

"I SUPPOSE IF YOU ARE GOING TO WRITE ABOUT OTHER LIVES, YOU ARE COMPELLED TO EXAMINE YOUR OWN."

On Medicine and Fiction

A major in psychology coupled with a concentration in neuroscience helped pave the way for Rosemary Eseh '04 to attend medical school at George Washington University. But her Williams education also led her down a path she did not anticipate.

"Through studying about psychology," the 25-year-old says, "I learned about the power of the mind, and I found myself wanting to write often, wanting to create characters whose minds I could explore and define."

The result was her debut novel, *The Looming Fog*, which was published in 2006 by Oge Creations Books. Set in a fictional village in Eseh's homeland of Nigeria, the book chronicles the life of an intersexual child who is shunned by

its family and community and is granted omniscient sight.

Eseh wrote *The Looming Fog* to make sense of her mother's struggles as the youngest of 12 living in poverty in a rural Nigerian community that valued males over females. After Eseh's grandfather died, the remaining family neglected her mother and grandmother. "To this day," Eseh says, "My mom cannot talk about her youthful years without tears."

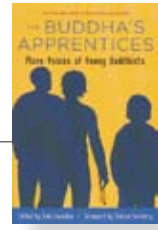
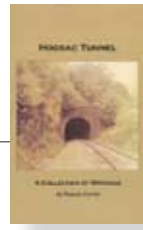
Eseh's own upbringing was quite different. Her parents started their lives together in Lagos City, where her mother's background was of little importance. Eseh's father became a foreman in the general services office of the American Embassy, and her mother

owned several shops and restaurants. Education was paramount to the family, and Eseh's father resigned from his job (rather than waiting to retire) so he could obtain visas for four of their six children to come to the U.S. for college.

Like her young character Kayinne, Eseh does her share of defying certain social norms. Though she was raised in a society where "a meal is not complete without some sort of meat or fish," for example, Eseh became a vegetarian three years ago—mainly as a distraction to the dismal weather she was experiencing in Williamstown.

Eseh had several more epiphanies after graduating from Williams. Raised Christian, she found that religion became more central to her life and was baptized in July 2005. She also started writing in earnest, publishing *The Looming Fog* using the last name "Esehagu," she says, to more clearly "separate my basic science-centered works from my literary works." (An earlier generation had shortened the family name from Esehagu, which means "the sacrifice is over.")

Eseh is at work on her second psychological novel, tentatively titled *In the Shadow of a Vestige*. "Actively pursuing my writing," she says, "allowed me to come into my full self." ■



MORE FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Stop Being Your Symptoms and Start Being Yourself: A 6-Week Mind-Body Program to Ease Your Chronic Symptoms. By Arthur J. Barsky '64 et al. Collins, 2006. A clinically tested program designed to overcome the symptoms of chronic illnesses of every kind.

Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq. By Magnus Bernhardsson, assistant professor of history. University of Texas Press, 2005. How politics and archaeology intersect in Iraq to build a sense of nationalism among differing religious traditions and ethnicities.

Hoosac Tunnel: A Collection of Writings. By Francis Currier (Currier Smith '39). Self published, 2005. A series of essays, many of which focus on the author's life on the Sudbury River in Concord, Mass.

A Voice of their Own: The Authority of the Local Parish. By the Rev. William Clark, S.J. '80. Liturgical Press, 2005. Using three parishes as examples, the author argues that a fundamental aspect of ecclesiastical authority resides in the local community.

Artless: The Odyssey of a Republican Cultural Creative. By Gary D. Cole '81. Ooligan Press, 2006. The memoir of a stalwart Republican and producer of controversial plays who carved out a niche for himself in the seemingly diametrically opposed worlds of politics and art.

The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself. By Philip Fradkin '57. University of California Press, 2006. The story of a city shaped by the country's greatest urban disasters of the time—with previously unpublished eyewitness accounts and photographs.

In the Shadows of War: A 20th Century Memoir. By Fred Greene, the A. Barton Hepburn Professor of Government, emeritus. Williams College, 2006. The author traces the rise of the U.S. to its current role as a leading world power through the lens of his own life.

The iPINIONS Journal: 2005: A Year in Review. By Anthony Livingston Hall '84. iUniverse, 2006. A review of the author's daily commentaries on current events, found at www.thepinionsjournal.com.

Soul Searching: One Man's Search for Life's Meaning Through the Wisdom and Faith of Others. By A.E. Jeffcoat '46. iUniverse, 2006. The late author offers affirmations of Christian faith through the testimony of Albert Einstein, Mother Teresa, Leo Tolstoy and Abraham Lincoln, among many others.

more on page 28

RACE MATTERS



Jim Dandy

Do stereotypes affect academic performance? Have ideas about black cultural inferiority mobilized white voters in presidential elections? How did West African religion make its way into Brazilian music? These questions and many others were addressed during the fall installment of the Africana Events Calendar, organized by the Africana studies program. Among the recent offerings:

Race, Sex, Power: Dialogues on Community, a student discussion facilitated by Africana studies faculty.

Café, a concert and interactive workshop led by guitarist Freddie Bryant, visiting artist in residence in Africana studies and music, and Edson "Café" da Silva, a Brazilian percussionist, singer and composer.

The Triumph of Patriarchal Christian Racism, lecture by Edmund Gordon, Sterling Brown '22 Visiting Professor of Africana Studies.

The High: The Tragic Fate of New York City's Model Public School, lecture by Craig Wilder of Dartmouth, former Williams history professor.

For more information, visit www.williams.edu/africana-studies/

LIFE OF THE MIND

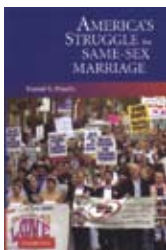


The Buddha's Apprentices: More Voices of Young Buddhists. Edited by Sumi Loundon '97. Wisdom Publications, 2006. A collection of writings by teenagers, young adults and established Buddhist teachers that explore the challenges faced by young people on their spiritual paths.

It's a Jungle Up There: More Tales from the Treetops. By Margaret Lowman '76 et al. Yale University Press, 2006. A pioneering treetop ecologist, joined by her teenage sons as co-authors, weaves messages about tropical rainforest exploration, conservation and science education with the challenges of raising a family.

Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning: A Reader. Edited by Eric Matson '92 et al. Oxford University Press, 2006. Key readings on knowledge management, with a focus on current practices at leading corporations.

The Eternity Artifact. By L.E. Modesitt Jr. '65. Tor Books, 2006. A novel employing four different narrative perspectives about an exploratory space voyage to an uninhabited world called Danann.



Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment. By Francis Oakley, former Williams president and Edward Dorr Griffin Professor of the History of Ideas, emeritus. Blackwell Publishing, 2006. The history of kingship around the world and the tenacity of its connection with the sacred.

Also by Francis Oakley: **Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas.** Continuum, 2005. An examination of three bodies of theory on the existence and grounding of human or natural rights that developed between the 13th and 17th centuries.

Joel Perlman: A Sculptor's Journey. By Philip F. Palmedo '56. Abbeville Press, 2006. A volume illustrating the American metal sculptor's work and its relationship to his interesting life.

Encounter: A Handbook of the Williams College Museum of Art's Collection. Edited by Vivian Patterson '77, Grad Art '80, WCMA curator of collections. The President and Trustees of Williams College, 2006. An illustrated outline for a visitor's encounter with the museum, written through the eyes of faculty, students, community members and museum staff.

The Ultimate Marketing Toolkit: Ads that Attract Customers. Brochures that Create Buzz. Websites that Wow. By Paula Peters '95. Adams Media, 2006. A resource for small businesses looking to improve their marketing materials.

America's Struggle for Same-Sex Marriage. By Daniel R. Pinello '72. Cambridge University Press, 2006. In-depth interviews chronicle the evolution of the social movement for same-sex marriage in the U.S.

Birding in Winter. By Susan Edwards Richmond '82. Finishing Line Press, 2006. The lifelong naturalist's second poetry chapbook.

Intown Living: A Different American Dream. By Dick Rigby '57 et al. Island Press, 2005. Studies of eight North American cities experiencing a renaissance.

Perfume: Joy, Scandal, Sin: A Cultural History of Fragrance from 1750 to the Present. By Richard Stamelman, professor of comparative literature. Rizzoli International Publications, 2006. Perfume's impact on history, culture, society, art and attitudes.

ON CD

Strange Conversation. By Kris Delmhorst '92. Signature Sounds Recordings, 2006. The artist's fourth studio album finds inspiration in poetic works and sets them to music.

Recovery. By Cycle of Addiction, including Kirsten Hazler '93. Self-produced, 2005. A debut album described as modern folk rock with a punch.

Open Eyes. By Bebek, including Lynn Murphy Michalopoulos '97. Self-produced, 2006. An album mixing organic electronica with European experimentation and American soul.