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Continue the Temporary and It Becomes Forever¹

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I wasn't yet familiar with Kay Sage prior to a posting of her work [In The Third Sleep](#)² on Facebook by the New York art critic and curator [David Rimanelli](#).³ Upon seeing her desolate landscapes I sensed a visual resonance with my own work [Biography of Catastrophe](#)⁴ an ongoing project primarily concerned with shifting ideas and adaptation to physical circumstances using sails from ships as metaphors. This work was born out of a desire to explore [continuity](#)⁵ from an initial interest in Buddhism and later input from Deleuze's notion of becoming: "History amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new."⁶

Before beginning *Biography of Catastrophe* I'd been thinking about photography's role in representing the past. I wanted to follow something esoteric in nature, an underlying premise that had an open weightless quality, a poetic trajectory solely concerned with moving forward, and that every step in this continuous project would determine a shift further away from the initial experience that prompted the work. I was interested also in how atmospheric events make ultimatums regarding adaptation and existence in defining the title *Biography of Catastrophe*.



The small paper sails I experimented with were shaped so easily in my windless studio. However when confronting their real life counterparts they required much more exertion. Forty feet in length and often dealing with uncooperative weather conditions near the Atlantic shores, folding them was a task for more than my own hands.





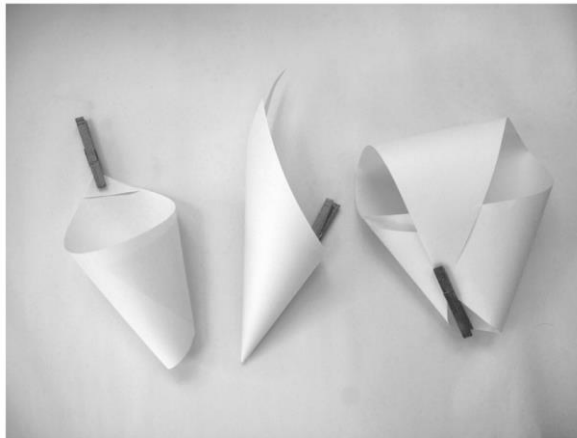
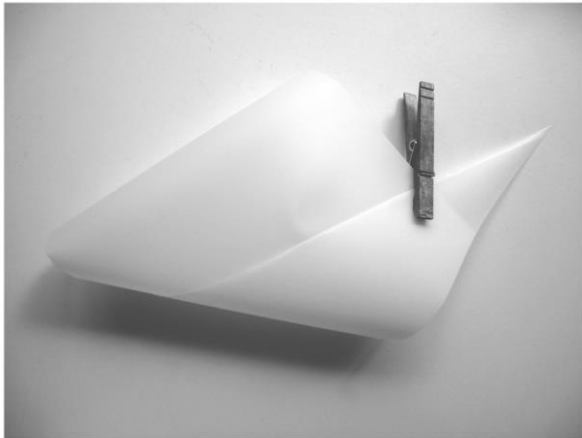
After all, sails were made to power ships across the ocean, meant to take a breeze and transform it into several knots of horsepower.



I viewed the sails as being removed from their source of power and purpose. No longer useful for sailors who rely on them for navigation, they would now become objects in an artistic inquiry.



North Captiva
From *Biography of Catastrophe* Image copyright © Sue Wrbcian, 2015



I wondered if the process of folding the tiny paper sails in relationship to their large counterparts represented a desire to control a larger reality.

Perhaps the narrative beneath these switches and changes and “making new” were experiences in my own life, job shifts, career trajectories, decisions that demanded letting go of previous ways of thinking in order to transition into a new and different life. At one point much of my working-for-a-wage was taken up learning “non-traditional” skills for a woman in the late 70’s & early 80’s for jobs in carpentry and cabinet-making, heavy labor in a steel mill and climbing poles for a cable television company. I also became a bit obsessed with vehicles, motorcycles, cars, trucks, metaphors for velocity and power. The sails were a different type of transport, as they depend on ones abilities to understand and respond to shifts in natural forces.

After moving into a new studio with very high ceilings I was presented an opportunity to create another level as the footprint was quite small, the size of a storage space. I was investigating scaffolding and the [use of bamboo](#)⁸ in Asia in building skyscrapers at the time the call for the Žižek conference proposals was announced with the theme of “parallax.”

In the meantime another twist occurred during my research into Kay Sage’s paintings when I came upon *Tomorrow is Never*. I interpreted this painting as not only scaffolding but also cages, perhaps jail cells, encasing sails that were isolated from their purpose: to move vessels. I wanted to know more about her, how she thought about her work, and why I hadn’t heard of her before.

As I learned more about Sage, and her relationship with her husband French surrealist painter Yves Tanguy, it was apparent she was not accepted into his [circle of Surrealists](#).⁹ It was often assumed Sage was mimicking her husband’s style. However, there has been significant conjecture that the two artists were very [influential on one another](#).¹⁰ Today, years beyond the historical misogyny among the inner circle of Surrealists, Sage has been increasingly recognized as having her own vision.



Sage, Kay © Copyright, Tomorrow is Never, 1955.

Oil on canvas, H. 37-7/8, W. 53-7/8 inches, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1955

Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY



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Installation at the Zizek Studies Conference, 2014 University of Cincinnati, DAAE

Reading more about the conference and parallax, I was struck by this quote from Žižek and its possibilities regarding what I had been thinking about with Sage:

“The standard definition of parallax is: the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight.”⁷

In response I continued my “temporary” work by interpreting the vision that Sage had in *Tomorrow is Never* through materiality and presence, a somewhat different approach to how I’d been working with the sails up until that point. I proposed placing a scaffold from *Tomorrow is Never* in the Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning building at the University of Cincinnati, to remove the “object” from its two dimensions and inhabit the post-modern space designed by Peter Eisenman.

I see *Continue the Temporary and It Becomes Forever* as representative of male/female power vascillation and the shifts occurring from differing perspectives. The title of my piece is a quote from Edward Albee’s play *Seascape* in which one human male/female couple and one lizard male/female couple engage in dialogue interpreted by some as symbolic of evolution.

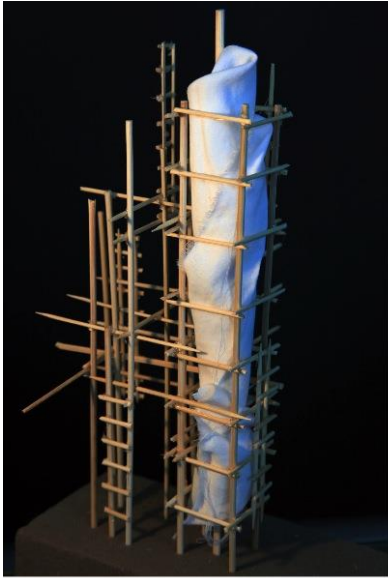
The ostracizing of Sage by the Surrealists is a situation that continues to be an [issue today](#) as the ratio of female to male artists represented in major museums and galleries is outweighed by male artists.¹¹



As the Surrealists refused to acknowledge women in their circle as being equal, it is important to understand that building this piece required the assistance of a dedicated team and recognize that the project was an exchange of skills, labor and knowledge.

Tom Ashcraft who runs the sculpture department at my university recommended the assistance of two students, Kelly Hendrickson and Chelsea Doherty-Kehn who had claimed their own work area in the metal shop at George Mason's School of Art sculpture studio and named it "LadySpace."

Their occupation within the metalshop in the sculpture studio impinged on traditional male territory and with its proximity to heavy machinery, presented a bit of a safety hazard.



Following a careful translation of my maquette into a cut list for a 20' tall installation, Dobert-Kehn and Hendrickson harvested "invasive" bamboo from local parks in Alexandria, VA and learned lashing techniques from Eagle Scout Master Mike Walton to assemble it.

Thanks to the following for the many aspects of this project:

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Preparing to raise the scaffold. Click image for [video](#) (video credit: Ben Ashworth)

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