





# on the OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

A MOMENT WITH ARTIST KATE KRETZ

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It's unusual in this TV/Internet/YouTube age for a painting to captivate the nation, but that's exactly what Kate Kretz did with her piece, *Blessed Art Thou*. The painting features an angelic Angelina Jolie holding her children in a Heaven-like state, floating above what looks to be a typical run-of-the-mill American superstore.



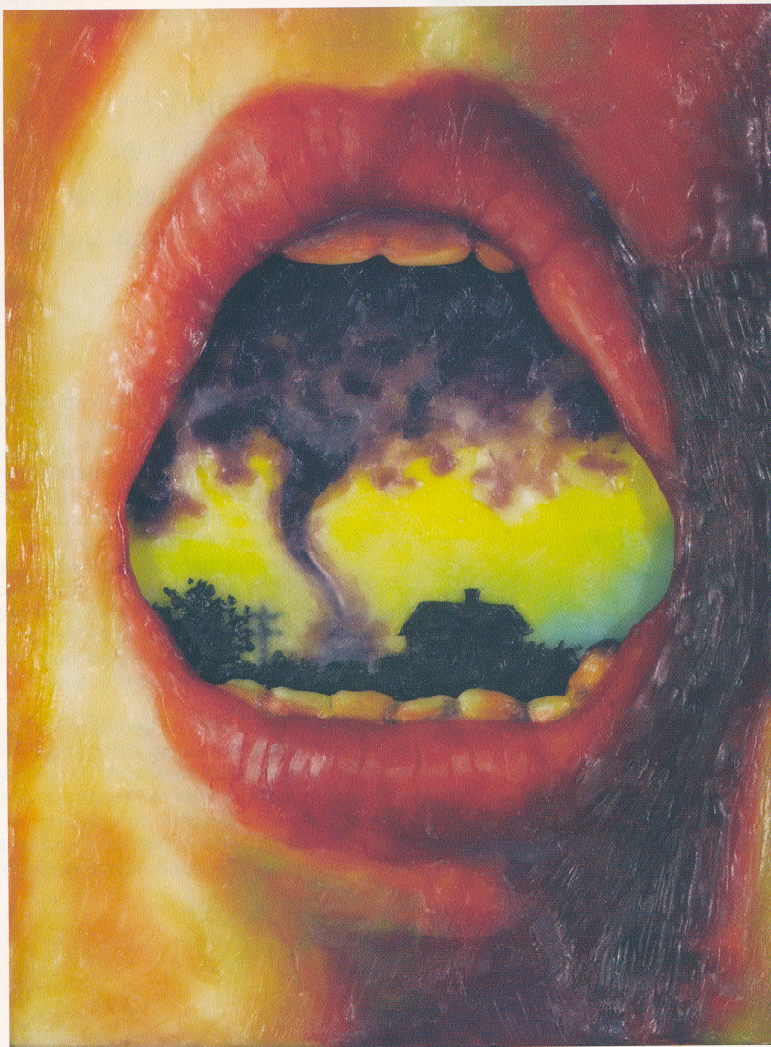
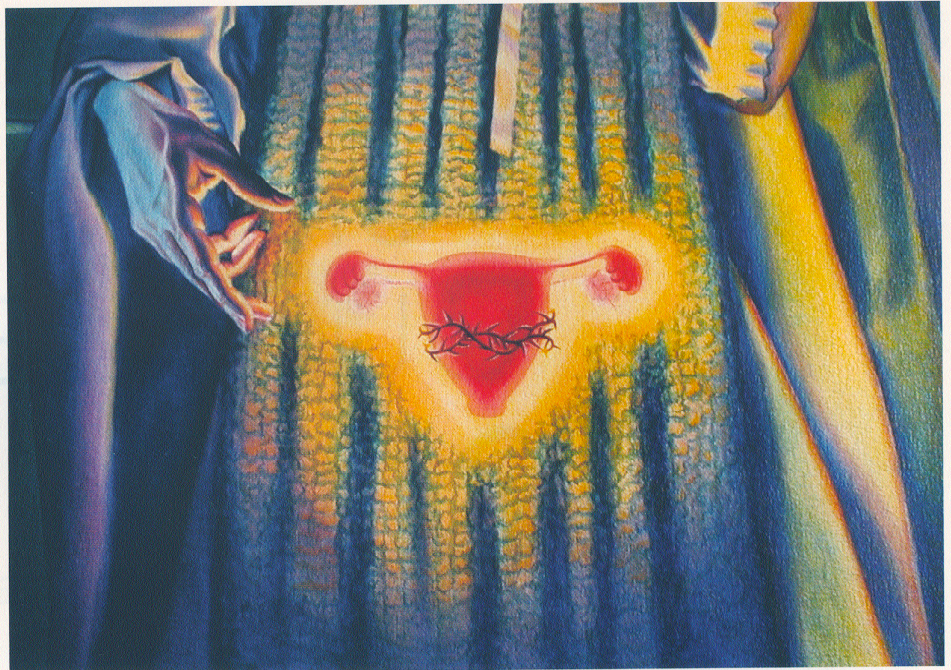
"I call it the painting that wanted to be made," says Kretz, who calls North Carolina her home. "I wanted to make this epic painting and have a celebrity up in the clouds...I wanted it to be about celebrity worship. Then I would censor myself and say, 'You can't do that, you've never done anything like that, it's not the right time to make a painting.' So I would put all my stuff away, but then a week or two later it would come back up again. Finally I said, 'OK, let's make this painting.' "

The idea to have Jolie star in *Blessed Art Thou* came from a very unusual place: the tabloids. Kretz explains, "I wanted to depict a celebrity and when I was standing in line at the supermarket you could not avoid her, so she seemed like a very natural choice. And she always had a baby in her arms and I thought, 'Madonna, Madonna, Madonna!'"

The Madonna who Kretz thought of was not the "Like a Virgin" pop star, but rather the religious figure. Kretz notes, "Most of my work has been inspired by the images of Catholicism." Her other inspiration is a bit different—Technicolor films. "Before the days of VCRs, my dad, who was a school teacher, used to put us to bed at six so that he could wake us up at nine to watch a really cool movie that he thought we needed to see. So the lurid colors and the light of both Catholicism and Technicolor films have always informed my work."

Those days of taking three-hour evening naps happened throughout Kretz's childhood in upstate New York. She would later spend a year in France, attend college at SUNY Binghamton, then grad school at the University of Georgia, and land a teaching gig at Florida International University in

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Miami. Then a funny thing happened. She met someone, got married, and was convinced to move to North Carolina, a move she refers to as “a big leap of faith.” The move was also the realization of one of her own theories in life. “I’ve always believed that you should have two or three different lives in your lifetime and if I wanted to practice what I preached, I would take the leap of faith.”

After years of creating inward-looking pieces, Kretz was all of a sudden looking outward. “I think that instead of looking inward—because my inward self was very new to myself—I started looking outward.” That look outward became *Blessed Art Thou*. Although the piece may be radically different in terms of how it was created, there are still some common themes between it and some of Kretz’s other pieces. “I frequently address issues of class,” she explains, “and I sometimes address issues of gender in my work.”

Kretz sees some distinct differences this time around, however, noting “Most of my life I’ve made work about human vulnerability, about showing yourself to other human beings and how that is the only way to connect to others.” Whether she’s going to go back to doing that, or continue to look outward, is something even she doesn’t know yet. “I’m spending a lot of time these days thinking, and I’m trying to sort of shut out the world’s response to the painting and figure out what I have to make next.”

She may not know what she wants to paint next, but Kretz recently felt the itch to return to the classroom again to teach a mini-semester at Elon University. With that completed, it’s back to the studio to conceive her next piece. ●

Check out Kate’s work at:  
[www.katekretz.com](http://www.katekretz.com)