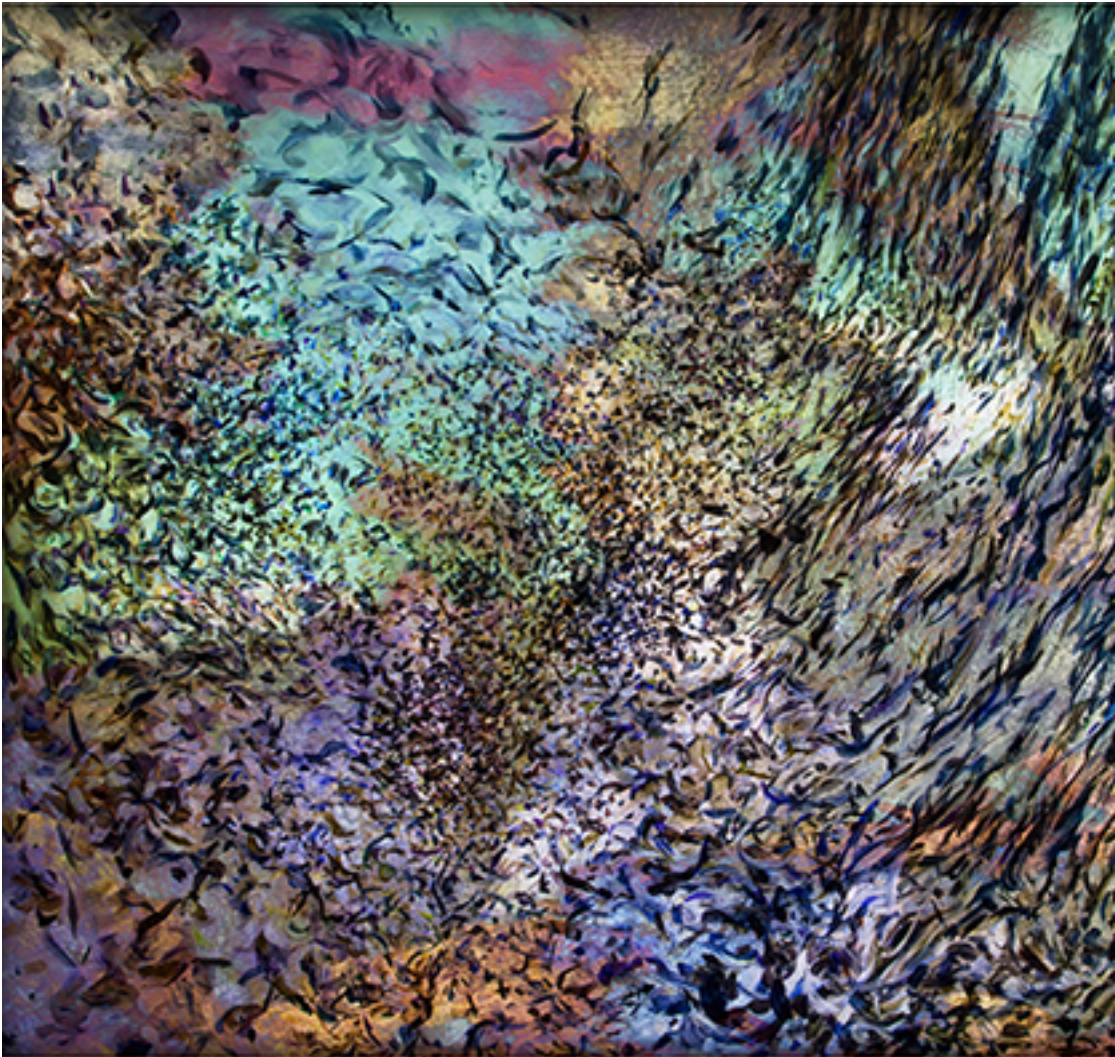


Naomie Kremer @ San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art

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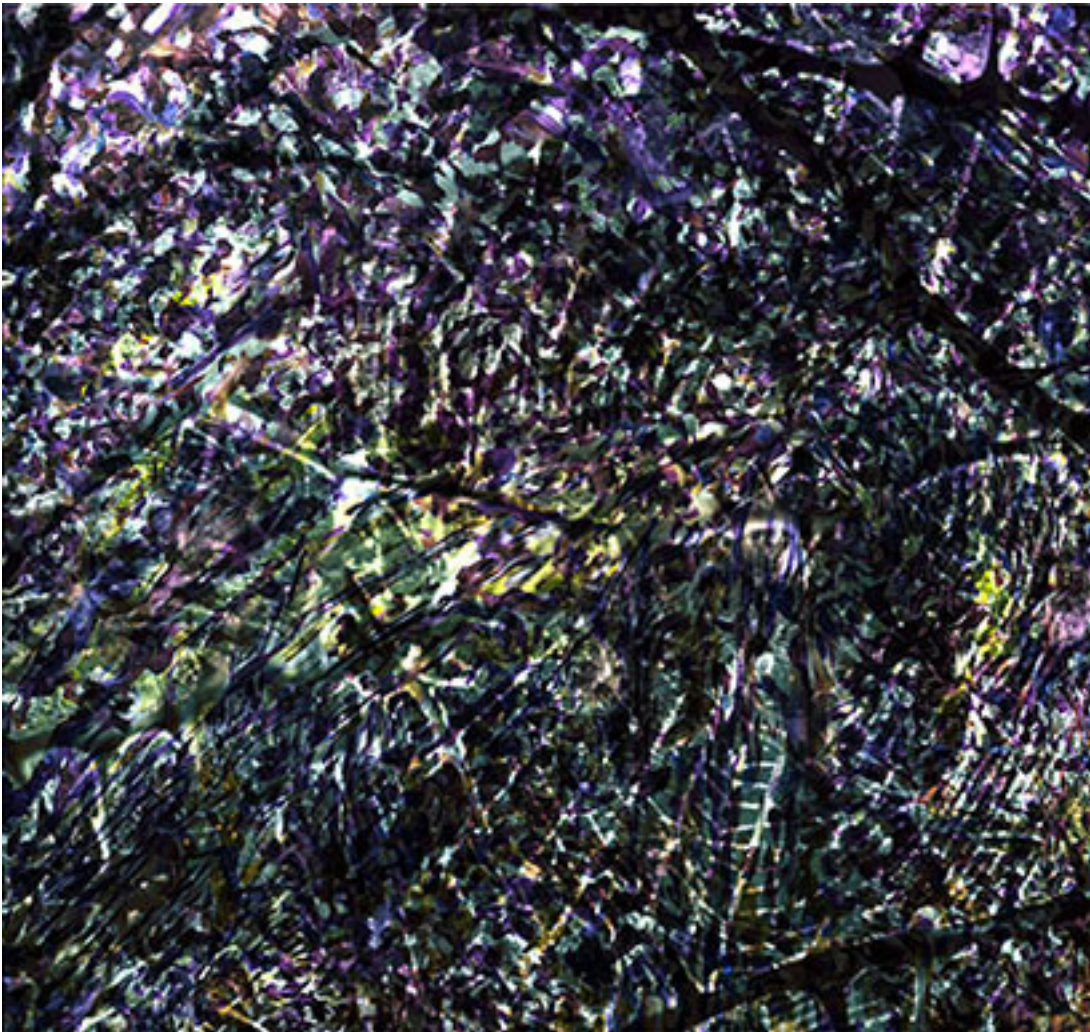
When Naomie Kremer mounted her first ICA show (*Keeping Time*) in 2005, her paintings were hyperkinetic thickets of roiling energy. Populated by layers of colliding shapes, colors and gestures, they pushed the non-objective impulse to its outer limits, harnessing what felt like primordial forces. *Age of Entanglement*, her current show, employs digital media to push those impulses even further. It includes video, animated text, light sculptures and “hybrid paintings” – works in which the artist projects moving images across painted surfaces. As with *Keeping Time*, *Age of Entanglement* holds fast to the idea that all things are interconnected and infinitely complex, but it also branches out to address issues of sexuality, technology and mortality.

The show, perfectly paced and masterfully installed, gives pride of place to the hybrids. At a distance they resemble backlit transparencies. Up close they feel like filmic portals. The most captivating of the five on view, *Walkabout*, gives the illusion of trees and foliage in a forest canyon being ruffled by a gentle breeze; or, if viewed from a different angle: the sky seen from the bottom of a reef, with rays of sunlight casting shadows across sea plants swayed by the tide. These quasi-anamorphic possibilities show how observation changes the nature of the thing observed. But the most exciting aspect of the piece is how it plays with our sense of time. It does so first by integrating the pieces so well that it becomes impossible to distinguish the painted parts from the projected parts, and second, by presenting them as objects: an act we intuitively take to mean freezing a discrete moment. To look, then, is to experience that compact being broken and to entertain the idea that a painting might be a living, animate thing.



Kremer, of course, is not the first to do this. Stage designers have long employed this method, which is how Kremer came to it, having previously created sets for the San Francisco Opera and the Berkeley Opera. However, by presenting the hybrids as abstract paintings, Kremer achieves what feels like a breakthrough.

Her videos pack a different kind of punch. *Lookout*, which occupies the back wall of the gallery, combines two different pieces of footage: one of a denuded tree filled with vultures, the other of a bather staring into the distance, both shot at night. The images at first appear to be static, but quickly reveal motion: the birds can be seen preening themselves and the figure slowly turns from side to side. The juxtaposition of these seemingly disparate scenes appears to argue for the existence of parallel realities, each operating independent of the other; but the symbolic weight of the vultures is simply too strong. They make palpable the specter of mortality. So, too, does a video on an opposite wall called *So Far*. It's built around the image of a river split so as to appear to be flowing in opposite directions. Over top of it, the artist superimposes computer-generated images of her own body. It spins like a top, shuttling back and forth along a narrow corridor that runs deep into the picture plane. The vision set forth is of a continuum, an endless cycle of death and rebirth, matter and its dissolution.



Actual entanglement appears in two places: *Only Connect*, a video animation projected onto the gallery floor, and *The Web*, a hybrid painting. The first begins with simple sketches of faces but quickly accelerates, piling up geometric and decorative patterns in ever-deepening layers, so that within seconds the drawing becomes a mass of overlapping sprocket-like shapes. *Web* explores the same idea more subtly, setting before us, a softly undulating (and equally impenetrable) labyrinth of lattices and grids that appears to “breathe.” Personal and topical matters occupy a smaller, but no less significant part of the show. *Write Off*, a video animation, shows a hand wielding a pencil and a pair hands audibly typing on an invisible computer keyboard. The opening text, accompanied by scratchy pencil sounds, reads: “Keyboarding is killing handwriting. Hardly practiced, handwriting gets harder and harder.” The text goes on to contrast the uniqueness of handwriting with the anonymity of typing. That lament, at this juncture, may seem mundane and rather obvious. But I assure you it’s not. If you remember practicing penmanship as a child and you savor the pleasure of forming characters and words by hand, *Write Off* may trigger intense pangs of longing. On an adjacent wall, a video animation of text taken from the artist’s diaries unspools in the manner of televised closed-captions. It’s called *My Guys* and it probes Kremer’s relations with men. The content, while intimate, isn’t nearly as important as the suspense of generated by the words, which are continuously erased and replaced. That, too, may trigger some feelings, perhaps those laying dormant in the recesses of your own psyche.



Is there a through line in all of this activity? Kremer, in a lecture at the ICA in June, wondered aloud. She answered by invoking quantum entanglement, a theory which holds that particles, even if separated, can influence each other through the simple act of measurement. Her conclusion: “I realized that this is how I know there must be a connection between the different branches of my work – because of entanglement.”

Because of entanglement? I realize it's fashionable these days for artists to claim connections to science, but for Kremer the effort seems superfluous. The elements of this show cohere magnificently, and it's not because her work aligns with or illustrates ideas of quantum mechanics, but because the value of her work is intrinsic; it registers on impact, reflecting the artist's intelligence and the rigorous process by which she brings it to life.

–DAVID M. ROTH