

Here is Another Somewhere: On Basil King's Art

by Kimberly Lyons

The occasion of a 2017 exhibition of paintings by artist and poet Basil King at the NYC John Molloy Gallery just a few months after the close of two shows of his visual art in North Carolina, (at Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center and at St. Andrews University) and the occasion of King's narration of the 2014 Black Mountain Song celebration at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, compels a retrospective assessment of his work. The 2012 film "Basil King: Mirage" (made by Nicole Peyrafitte and Miles Joris-Peyrafitte) screened at a conference on King's work held at Anthology Film Archives in NYC (which I helped to organize along with eleven other poets) was a start.

Brooklyn-based Basil King, a painter, draftsman and poet, has developed a corpus of over 900 works in the mediums of oil paint, oil sticks, ink, charcoal, "library" chalks, archival molding paste, pencil, pastels, ballpoint pen, and watercolors. His 16 books of writings combine poetry and memoir and micro essays on various artists. King's work has straddled several art periods and literary scenes while moving forward with his own line of exploration as he develops a body of work that is not easily typified and that encompass both figuration and abstraction, poetry and prose. In many of his paintings, a lucid detailing of figure undulates into abstracted ground. In his writings, the narrative will break off into a poem employing both compacted utterance and lyrical phrase. Side by side with King's paintings are his numerous series of abstract drawings; broad layered bands of color in one series and electrically sparking vertical lines in another.. Since 1958, King's art has distinguished over 60 covers of books and journals of poetry by poets including Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Paul Blackburn and John Godfrey, among many others. This is an enormous body of work, divergent in its strata and almost uncategorizable.



Queen of Hearts – Highway Obstacle, one of the “Cards” series
© Basil King, collection of the artist.

To further contextualize and describe King's work, I looked at the arts that emerged from – or were furthered by -- artists and writers, students and teachers, at Black Mountain College, where King as BM's youngest student studied painting in the years before it closed. Black Mountain is an obvious starting point and yet for King, a complex association complicated and layered by the stylistic affiliations of King's paintings with an "arc" of works of the past by artists such as Franz Kline and others.

Certainly, since about 2003, King's work has increasingly been seen in a Black Mountain framework. First, there are the two exhibitions related specifically to Black Mountain mentioned above. His poetry was included in the anthology of writings generated and stimulated by Black Mountain ideas and sources; the 2014, *Far From the Centers of Ambition*. King's painting "Mirage" was included in the survey of Black Mountain art at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid in 2003. Curator of the exhibition, poet Vincent Katz, describes King's arc of development in the catalog *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*:

Basil King's art has taken a different path since his student days. At a certain point in the 1960's, King, who had worked as an assistant to Gottlieb, Motherwell, Newman, and Rothko, turned to the figure as a major source of inspiration. "My first love was abstract expressionism," writes King. "When I stopped being an abstract expressionist, I had the courage to look for something new, and I believe I got that at Black Mountain. The people there were brave. They persisted at a time when nobody wanted them." In *Mirage* ... King makes use of a free reference to human physiognomy, rendering the figure more fantastical than realistic, allowing its emotional and formal valences to take precedence.

King has always acknowledged how he has been sustained in part by his experience of the attitudes and spirit of BM and by his contact with persons there; yet an examination of how King's visual work --and its characteristically Black Mountain mix of genres and forms-- makes contact with affiliations and concepts in some association with BM has not yet been fully undertaken. Perhaps, this is the case because in part, King's paintings include "...things in the world.... Animate and inanimate. Pigeons are in there. Flowers. Buildings. People. Love of the city" (King, email, February 2016) his work has not yet been viewed as being without precedence in the way we have been oriented to expect with art tagged "Black Mountain." I find a more expansive vision in remarks made by poet, painter and essayist George Quasha (at the aforementioned conference on King's work) in which Quasha connected King's project and energy to William Blake. A high bar, yes, but if it's considered - apt.

I also have found that King's quality of making art within a field of art historical resonances is remarkably like aspects of Robert Duncan's thought. This connection evolved as I read Robin Blaser's 1992 essay "The Elf of It" in *The Fire: Collected Essays*. Blaser quoted poet Robert Duncan (with whom King studied at Black Mountain but who has not been discussed in relation to King's work previously) making a statement that twined so closely with statements by King, that it was startling. Duncan writes:

What I would point out in my work as one of its underlying currents is the weaving of a figure unweaving, an art of unsaying what it says, of saying what it would not say.... I've but to twist and

to turn to let it show.... I want to see the mercurial genius of language, the “Elf” who comes when I lose myself in reading the workings of language in the water. (297).

In his *Learning to Draw/A History*, King describes a similar unweaving or meander:

Lo, the line comes from outside. Sometimes it comes as a fast ball and other times it meanders making circles...my contradictions reinvent inheritance...I have fourteen eyes and am seven different people (11)

Among Black Mountain’s multiple layers, zones, and contrasting poetics is Duncan’s weaving of a figure unweaving in a consonance with the wandering line as a figure. “...Coming into form by attention” Blaser’s phrase to describe Charles Olson’s use of Whitehead, points to how a coming into form through reading; by improvisation and by recovery of the works we exist within may be read as a particularly Black Mountain set of gestures if the overarching nomenclature of Black Mountain includes various tangents and overlaps of project, persons and time. I am indebted here to a reading of Duncan’s poetics offered by poet and scholar Nathaniel Mackey in his essay “The World Poem in Microcosm: Robert Duncan’s The Continent.”

I will expand further on this discovery in the following brief exploration though it is not yet fully accountable to what further research may reveal. In response to my inquiry as to the nature of the Duncan/King relation, King responded in an email that he took a poetry class with Duncan at Black Mountain and that they socialized in the community. That they were also in some social contact during King’s years in San Francisco when King hung out with Jack Spicer and other poets and painters. Years after King’s apprenticeship in the ‘60s to the abstract expressionist painters in NYC, Duncan responded positively to King’s work when he made a visit to King’s studio during a poetry festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan which King’s teaching colleagues at the college there organized. The writer Martha King, Basil King’s life partner, writes in her memoir *Outside Inside* that at this point a rapprochement of equals was started. Whereas the youthful, British-accented King had been at points a butt of Duncan’s bitchiness at Black Mountain, now his seriousness as a painter was recognized. There was a significant incident during this festival in which a notebook of Duncan’s was taken or misplaced by a student. Very upset, Duncan called out for King to find the book. “Basil will know how to get it back. Get Basil, get Basil.” In one of the weird fortuitous events of King’s life, he was able to locate the notebook and return it to Duncan. It is not the factuality of their relationship, which is indeed present, but the shared attitudes and similar use of structures within self that reveal the bond. King’s writings consistently present a reading of art works, painters, writers and writing with a sweep of connections between them that is like Duncan’s fevered apprehension of particular literary works in history as coexistent and relevant. For Duncan, art is empathetically connected by an imaginatively open and informed reading that resists received literary and art-historical categories. What Mackey names as “Duncan’s inclusionist alchemy.” Both Duncan in his poetry and King with his figurations explore being in essence and liminal actions of becoming further. In King’s paintings a mutable unstable figure comes into partial cohesion within a hued, subjective ground. The term “subjective” is used here rather insufficiently to refer to what I sense is King’s intuitive use of color as a gestational field of thought and feeling. An intermediate location that fixes and imprints a space for calling forth emergence of figuration in what George Quasha terms, “unprecedented” forms in his essay “The Poetics of Thinking.” (I

am indebted to his discussion of liminality here). Duncan's omnidirectional state of attention that brings forth the poem's measure and revelation aligns in important ways with King's attitudes and practice.

"From the abstract to the figure/from the figure to the abstract" is how King in his essay "Looking for the Green Man" offers his sense of a cross hatched, code switching activity of back and forth from figuration to abstraction. (A more complex consideration than is offered in this present essay would examine art historical definitions and theories of abstraction and figuration which, as King's work suggests, are overly contained terms). Mackey quotes Duncan as stating in a 1971 interview published by Coach House Press: "I am not going to take Charles alternatives. I am going to take the closed form versus the open form because I want both, and I'll make up the forms that have closed forms in them and closed forms that are open." In the *The H.D. Book* Duncan envisions open and intermingling energies making art for a prophesized future:

For the next epoch...it is the comparison of all things or the mixing of the waters – but this is the thicket. Bushman, shaman of the Lapland wastes...and Michelangelo are brought into one complex concept of art...as people's mix, the song of the populated self... enter in to form a cosmopolitan language. (392)

King has a shared perception when he writes that "We know we can endure because each one of us has become one of the other." King's prose poem writings return throughout his various books to a registration of the impact on his consciousness of art works by a range of artists in time that act equivalently and unhierarchically in a art historical sense.

Poet H.D. is a shared touchstone. Duncan's profound correspondence with H.D.'s work is richly discussed in *The H.D. Book*. H.D. like King had endured World War II in London. A reading of her prose deepened for him the possibilities of representing multiplicities of perspective and self. King's articulates the connection in *Learning to Draw/A History*:

I wrote the poet H.D. into *Learning to Draw/A History* and she became my muse. Her book *The Gift*, edited and annotated by Jane Augustine, was written in London during the Second World War. In it H.D. internalizes her Moravian upbringing, her daily fears...and her love The line circles around to David Rattray. He interviewed H.D. when she was old and he was a teenager. Years later, I drew David at my studio on 39th Street in Brooklyn. (*Learning to Draw/ A History*, 13)

King's creative partnership with writer Martha King, also briefly a teenage attendee of Black Mountain in the late 50s is a strong source for both his and Martha King's work. Martha King has written accounts of hers and their shared experience in her prose, poetry, and the previously cited memoir, *Outside Inside*. Within their art and book-filled brownstone in Brooklyn, she edited the poetry magazine *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle* and wrote *Imperfect Fit: Selected Poems* and collections of short stories: *North & South* (2007), *Separate Parts* (2002), and *Little Tales of Family and War* (2006). As "Basil King: Mirage," the 2012 film on Basil King depicts, they have constructed a generative environment for mutual production. "A household of imagination" Blaser wrote of Robert Duncan's and partner Jess's domestic environment. H.D. and her partner Bryher's tolerance of psychic complexity within a creative household matrix also suggests comparison.

King's affiliation with Duncan is a thread that is twined with poet Charles Olson. King has attested in various documents and writings that poet Robert Creeley, who became a lifelong friend and Olson, who was rector at Black Mountain and King's mentor, are his primary artistic influences along with painter Franz Kline with whom he studied at BM. King's "Letter to Charles Olson" (in *Letters for Charles Olson*) and the preface King wrote to *Olson at Goddard College* describes Olson as a galvanizing energy.

Charles at the blackboard with a cigarette in one hand and a piece of chalk in the other --- *I was never sure: did he follow culture or did culture follow him?*

He was the diesel, the energy that fueled my Black Mountain.

Charles gave me Rimbaud ... he was a wonder... He opens my pores. Every word is three dimensional, the sensational seen from all sides contributes to the passage...."(*Olson at Goddard College*, xi).

However much King's encounter with BM was foundational, in his early creative years in New York, King struggled with and worked through in his art the knots of the abstract expressionism legacy and its associated expectations. In the 80s, a surge of activity brought about new figurative works that consolidated King's oeuvre and finally integrated these streams and by the 90s the whole corpus is confidently King's own. A reading of how King's body of works came into an approach to wholeness begins with a brief survey of his affinities.

King's painting in the 1980s is very much of that time. His paintings share some ground with painter Susan Rothenberg's works for her evanescent, kinetic figuration within an abstracted painterly space of choppy dimensional paint strokes akin to Phillip Guston's abstractions, and with Elizabeth Murray's paintings for their plasticity and play of abstracted biomorphic figuration that bend planes, ground and orientation. Moreover, the paintings and drawings of Leon Golub, R.B. Kitaj, Francis Bacon and Fran Herndon by all sorts of confluence are also affiliated with King's work. An artist with a path like King's in some respects is Ray Johnson who also attended the Detroit Institute of Arts as a teen and then went on to Black Mountain College. Johnson created a context for his formats, materials and mode of delivery as parallel streams of a whole project as King has in making visual works, providing art works for poets books and in his hybrid writings. Though not contemporaries, but rather a strange group of cousins – painters who write and nervous writers who draw and paint - Federico Garcia Lorca, Henri Michaux, Elizabeth Bishop and Duncan himself -- are companions in spirit. King wrote in an email, elaborating on points in his *Where Daffodils Grow*, "I think of Marsden Hartley as my uncle and Emily Carr as my aunt." King's verbal portraits of these writer/artists (among many other written portraits) in his books reference salient points of the artists' development. Accounts that present a theatre of contemporaneous art making that hums with Duncan's conversations with past eras and figures of poetry.



"Pastorale" from Basil King's Baseball series, collection of Tom Seaver, used with permission.

A series of baseball paintings King began in the early 1980s were the indication of a new phase in his process towards an integrated whole work. In the limpid "Pastoral" (oil/canvas, 45" x 35", 1983), an enormous figure flails an arm at the end of which a mitted, clubbed (left) hand holds the merest wisp of a white hovering ball. At the periphery of the painted landscape, tree-like columns float over Arcadian ground as liminal guards demarking areas. Between Doric columns of a blood red dirt, a stream of glowing white paint stands in as the public, the stadium, and the arena. A blue-gray and green of specific, moody, shades no stadium we have ever seen offers surrounds the player as though this "here" is another somewhere. The weirdness of it is that although there is an intrinsic baseball vocabulary with the poised, pitched throw, the ground is a serene supernal fluid, a floating world of Hiroshige with Utagawa's lurching samurai as pitcher. The muscled loose forms are as undulant as Thomas Hart Benton's cantilevered torsos or Marsden Hartley's clouds.

I read the play of the game as that the artist, poised and just about to throw his ball back from preconscious awareness into what might be described as the reception of the crowd; that King at that point in his work used the mythology and dynamics of baseball to mirror his fraught connection to the art world. It's of note that King started to write seriously, and voluminously, with his long piece *mirage; a poem in 22 sections* only two years after completing this painting. Perhaps "Pastoral" brought forward the player. A player who is left-handed, by the way.

Two other paintings in this 1980s series, "M in the Water" (oil on canvas, 50" x 67", 1986) and "The Falling" (oil/canvas, 66.5" x 50", 1986) depict baseball players in attitudes that allude to representations of Christ being baptized and crucified and St. Paul falling at Damascus particularly in the torsion of figure and

weighted materiality that refers to Caravaggio; conveyed, however, in frosty, grayed Northern European tonalities that evoke the pixilation of a black- and- white TV.

In the 90s, King continued to open up registers of figurative possibility and explored in paintings and writing the persistent traces of WWII traumas including injury by bomb, displacement from home, and near death brought on by taunting, anti-Semitic British youths as he describes in his 2015 chapbook *A Pigeon in Delacroix's Garden*. The abstraction in this period is of a mantle of delineation and color, a caul from which figures and objects emerge in to the surface and coalesce. "Three faces were producing a wall that blocked the road," King writes in his poem sequence *mirage* (which became the text for the 2012 film). Deeply involved in writing poems and prose pieces, after travel back to Britain for the first time since leaving as a pre-teen, King started the "Green Man" series of paintings. In *Learning to Draw/A History*, King describes how in these paintings he evokes the faces he saw in the London Underground bomb shelters. I would suggest that although the memory of those faces may be the source of the paintings they became totems that are beyond local portraits. In two of the Green Man portraits, the eyes and mouths are dragged swipes that fleetingly portray a trout shaped fish that flies through the mouth as in some First Nation People's masks of a bear with a salmon in the mouth. In each of these Green Man paintings, the head is ovoid and lengthened; the eyes are slots as the apertures of a mask from which in every instance a vulnerable intelligence emits a dark ray. Mouths and noses have gone askew in a contorted, semi-human "mirage" effect and the face itself is a stacked narrative. In "Walter" (oil/canvas, 40" x 26", 1996) the beak and eye of a bird, perhaps a crow, emerges at a juncture from the human figuration.



"Francis" from The Green Man series,
© Basil King, collection of the artist.

In “Francis” (oil/canvas, 40” x 26”, 1996) a face is stealthily revealed underneath a mask. The enigmatic expression on the whitened orb of a moon-faced ghost might be encapsulated in the words “ha ha.” (In fact, a King charcoal drawing, an abstraction, has that very word imbedded.) This series utilizes a chilly gray blue ground. Darkened citrine and oxblood cut across the surfaces as though consisting of the stuff underneath epidermis. “Guy” (oil/canvas, 40” x 26” 1997) is bathed in a cloudy, watery blood shade lightened with an inexplicable source of white from the upper left of the canvas as though the figure were exposed to an astral light source. The fauvist surface of “Pluto” (oil/canvas, 40” x 26”, 1996) is as blue as venous blood and the right eye has gone inside, revealing an egg shaped hole. The left eye peers out all calculation and vigilance and the mouth -filled in with intersecting sections of complicated paint- suggests an alphabet orally transmitted. In “Billie” (oil /canvas 40” x 26,” 1996) warm tones and level, relatively approachable eyes peer out with an ambivalent pained expression. The coral mouth is feminine. The tones of paint are vintage gray plum -a velvet robe surrounding a strange, indescribable shade of earthy green that pervades the head like moss. We would not be wrong to view these portraits as related to Modigliani’s “Pierre Reverdy” with geometricized faces caught just as a complex of cognition and feeling occurs.

King went on to further articulate figurations. In “A Man and his Toons” (mixed media on canvas, 72” x 46”, 2012) the figure seems caught in a slow motion transfiguring shift as it cuts across space in a swath of mauves with just an outline of blazing crimson along the shoulder bones like an aura or halo. The eyes shuttle sharply to the right and the mouth gathers up in a line of refusal. The paint swathed textures and their lucent, low-keyed chromaticism akin to a Morandi on fire is gorgeous. I read this twisted figure as emerging from all of Modernism’s deepest pool. With the Green Man series and the other singular paintings of that period, King is giving full rein to surfacing beings. What writer and fellow Black Mountain student, Fielding Dawson, named King’s “toons.” King writes: “The toons had to be brought to the surface so they could be seen.” (*Learning to Draw* 174). I see ghosts called out and rather irritated about it. King writes: “A colored eye/ a thirsty tongue/ Bring him in bring him in” in *The Spoken Word/The Painted Hand*, (64). The faces in these works are stripped of cohesive façade and revealed at the crux of becoming. Convulsed in their quandary, fixed in the solidity of that crucial passage, the figures have a Muybridge transience as though King were depicting a past, present and future self in a cycle of gesture.

In the early 2000s, in tandem with writings about other artists, King made a set of paintings titled “Basil’s Arc.” He was now able to intersect fully with works of the past while expanding vocabulary and techniques. This series engages with works and artists in King’s pantheon and evoke and interpret, talk back to, and honor playfully these masters. They are Kings yet recognizably in the idiom of Picasso, Carr, Turner, Monet, Pollock, Van Gogh, among other painters he refers to. King wrote of this series: “And it is with devotion that my Arc grafts...the abstract and surreal comedians into its fold.” (LTD, 259). A statement which resonates with Duncan’s lines his “This is the Poem they are Praising as Loaded: “An anthology of human beings. A loaded folding up in which history is folded.” King describes in his *Learning to Draw* how other artists also have their arcs. “Picasso grabbed what Van Gogh started and turned it into a flesh-eating fucking body that breeds paint.” (LTD, 20). Optically fulfilling for their subtle colorations and contrasting painterly textures and ghosted allusions, these paintings are unironic.



"After Picasso" from Basil's Arc, © Basil King, collection of the artist.

King has written of the history of playing cards and of his own history of playing poker and fascination with cards. From 2000, the personages of the playing cards conjoin with others and become looming icons. Presences to confront. A further imagination of a theatre of chance, fate and skill initiated with the baseball paintings of the 1980s. King's own court of haunts that goes beyond pictorial representation of a card game and into a field of intuited singular presences at play . In this series, his iconography has become fully fleshed. "King of Diamonds (Orange)" (mm/canvas, 72" x 46", 2011) holds the enormous orange sun in his stretched jaw like a scarab holding a ball. A collision of tinted crystallized forms build an internal geometry of sharp turns and contradictions. "Two Kings of Diamond (Red)" (mm/canvas, 60" x 44" 2011) depicts mirror images of a jackal- like, ravenous and imperious masculine sign. A recognizable evocation of a male individual times two, but shape-shifted through lengthened shadowy strokes into The King in a nearly hallucinated domination. Yet there is a delicacy, a pursed-lip dab of cherry on this diamond, a slight reticence that tenses. The King is large and beautiful and of the court, yet seems trapped by a soul quality. King stated in a 2017 interview in *Local Knowledge* that he continues to paint this iconography .

The playing card iconography gives King a vocabulary to completely mutate and with "Mrs. Heart," (mixed media/canvas, 34" x 48" 2012) as he extends the forms started with the playing cards he also shadows Matisse's "La Lecon de Piano" and one of the portraits of Mrs. Matisse, in the contrast of acidic and grayed tones with the undulating drawn mark to suggest presence. Here, Mrs. H's heart fronts the self as a plummy

appendage. The face in receding is gray and squinched. The body all organ and tangled triangles. The figure dissolving into paint.

In the diptych “Two Queens of Hearts,” the figures leap out of their enthroned spaces, bound from court into a dimension of action and confrontation. The queen on the right is formidable. Lunging towards us like some Martina Navratilova, she swipes at the ether she comes from with her paw. Look at that right eye. It’s “The Girl with the Pearl Earring” gone viral, turned inward in concentration and desire while the left eye beams onward and out. The pink flesh armature of this being is made of a court-card geometry. Obstructed by her courtly ruff, she has to thrust around it.

What are we to make of this minyan of presences? “Maybe it’s all theatre” as King comments in his essay “Looking for the Green Man” (*The Spoken Word/The Painted Hand*). Certainly, the contradictions are of vital interest to King. All ten of the Green Man heads are capped by a band of paint that ties the head off, serving as a kind of yarmulke or fez cap. All associations of King’s figures with the Green Man of Celtic and Hindu mythologies and totems of Northwest American indigenous traditions may be intended. Each painting conveys an organic form that is human and somewhat something else; the way that a Green Man may be read as emerging from branch and shadow and foliage or carved stone in a dance of apparitional hallucination - or how a particular Queen is revealed within the scroll of a Bicycle brand box of playing cards. For King, perhaps, this figure is what he senses of the numinous.



Untitled mixed media drawing from Pigeons in Delacroix's Garden series,
© Basil King, on loan to St. Andrew's University, Laurinburg, NC

King's figurative paintings register psychic flux, an essential element of a core dilemma – as unknown to that figure yet observed by the painter. The dynamics of the spatial choreography of self and other, and the space between, are all activated in the flickering mutability of King's paint; as though the painter sees and turns away, sees and turns away, flooded with some hard-to-bear knowledge, and then is compelled to transmit the whole gestalt, bound by time, memory and the hand at work. These are uncompromising spiritual portraits and the figures we confront mirror something intimate and hidden and at work in ourselves. "The subject is tactile and has nerve endings that shock..." writes King about Rembrandt (81) and in the following lines refers to Netsuke figures implying the elements that come into the miniature and the brutality of their collision:

"Noah, Adam and Eve, the Prophets
The Gods of Wind and Rain, flora and fauna
A carved ivory Rabbit everyone's life is brutal. (14)

Robert Duncan wrote in his notebook (from the Robert Duncan biography on The Poetry Foundation website) : "A poem, mine or another's, is an occult document, a body awaiting vivisection, analysis, X-rays." King's paintings await further exploration also.

"Bird Scripts"(recent mixed media on paper, canvas, and board) and "A Pigeon in Delacroix's Garden" (all mixed media on Stonehenge paper, 20x23) and "The Windows (mixed media on Stonehenge paper, 40 x 26), are all from 2014 forward and depart from that which is seen in the artist's working space. "The Windows" series, in which vertical gridded bands frame painted space suggest the immanent trees and the shadows of King's oeuvre of standing figures. An array of nuanced tones hum together to make a striation that evokes the spiritual. In the "Bird Scripts," pigeons figure as enormous, powerful forms that wander at tangent to one another and the group within a painterly depth. Their pulchritude compels us to remember the art historical sense of doves signifying spirit and messengers from the Goddess Isis; associations we know of from H.D. and Robert Duncan. In his prose poem "The Immigrants" (*The Spoken Word, the Painted Hand*, 67) King writes a description of passenger pigeons and makes a link between the persecuted yet rigorous passenger pigeon and ship bound immigrants. The bobbing physicality of these giants is surrounded by an aura of grassy greens "the color of forgiving" as King writes (26) and glorious Fra Angelico angel pinks, here smudged, smeared and dirtied. A grimly smiling Jackson Pollock once said to King when he was a young man: "Wait 'til you have nothing to paint." Apparently, that juncture has not yet occurred.



"Perch" © Basil King, collection of the artist.

The issues King struggles with and the components of his art that he keeps in play simultaneously -ground, material, marks, abstraction, narrative and figure- resonate with the experimentations of a poet restlessly sorting out a barrage of influences and inflections. A welter of phenomena demanding to be turned over. King's description in *Learning to Draw/A History* of how he draws lines is relevant:

“ ... I draw straight lines. thick and curved lines and the ever-essential circle that brings me back to where. Lines lack meaning. They are weightless until the space surrounding them is activated.” (13)

I find solace and energy in the psychological ambiguities and tonal environment of his works. The sense of presences emerging into manifestation has become a shared understanding. I am certain that the experience gained of viewing his paintings has in some way made its way into the work of the poets who visit King's studio.

King's work is now truly under consideration. Freshly conceptualized clarifications of Black Mountain's tangents as being deep, far and various will encourage viewers and readers to perceive King's visual work as singular, eclectic, and contemporaneous in several essential contexts.

Basil King has continued his absorption in bird images during 2015-16. An exhibition of these most recent works – paintings and mixed media on canvas, board, and paper–opened on February 25, 2017 and continued through March at the John Molloy Gallery, 49 East 78th Street, Second Floor, New York City.

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Kimberly Lyons is the author of several books of poetry, most recently *Calcinatio* (Faux Press) and *Approximately Near* (www/Metambasen.org). A collected poems is forthcoming from Lunar Chandelier Press Collective.

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