

## Quad City Arts Show Emphasizes the Spiritual

Written by Michael LoGuidice  
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Spiritual elements run through the current show at Quad City Arts in The District of Rock Island, with two artists interested in the idea of a life-force connection. The exhibit features paintings by David Murray and intaglio prints by Katie Kiley and runs through March 22.

Kiley's work explores the interior landscape of "mudras" – hand positions used during meditation or healing as described in ancient Egyptian and Vedic literature. Murray paints somewhat surreal landscapes, incorporating natural components but using color and juxtaposition that one might never encounter except in dreams.

Kiley probably knows the original use of mudras but, out of consideration for those who aren't into New Age-ish topics, chooses to leave it out of her artist statement: "Mudras are most commonly understood to be symbolic hand gestures adopted for meditation or exposition. They represent the first efforts in sign language and can be found in Egyptian illustrations dating back thousands of years. The word 'mudra' comes from the Sanskrit word for ritual hand gesture and appears in the post-Vedic literature of India to designate a seal or imprint left by a seal. The Hindus and Buddhists borrowed these gestures to import magic and underscore the words of their sacred rituals."

It may be instructive, in looking at her art, to resurrect some of the metaphysical explanations surrounding mudras. Much like chiropractic and acupuncture, many ancient religions believe that the life force of a body flows in meridians throughout and surrounding our bodies. Chiropractors seek to align our bones so that the energy flows in a correct pattern. Acupuncturists seek to correct energy flows by inserting needles in or near meridians. Reflexologists indicate that organs of the body can be represented in our hands and feet. The ancient mudras were hand positions that encouraged "correct" energy flows throughout the body to promote health, healing, protection, or pleasure.

Here is a good test to see whether these energy-flow theories might have any resonance for you. With your mouth closed, touch the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth just behind your teeth. Hold it that way for a minute. Then stop touching the roof of your mouth with your tongue. If you feel a difference, a little less grounded, you might be a person who finds something of value in this energy business. If you don't feel a difference, you might find that it's

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a bunch on nonsense.

Kiley's *Mudra II – Blessing & Protection* is interesting to me. On a football field, this is the sign for a time out, except that often the right and left hand are exchanged. A time out is pretty much a call for protection and is oftentimes a blessing to the team that calls it. So it looks like some modern hand signals can trace their roots to the pre-history of India and Egypt.

Kiley's draftswomanship is exquisite, proved by the two copper intaglio plates. There are no strikeovers, corrections, or anything else marring the beauty of the plate. Her rendering of the hands in each of the prints is flawless.

I think this abstraction of one part of the human form helps her focus on her drawing; otherwise she might suffer from sensory overload. I say this because of her extremely sensual description of her work: "Above all else, I love to draw the figure. I delight in the infinite beauty of the human form; the bones and muscles, the skin and hair, all the intricacies of the eyes and ears and mouth. ... I watch for those intimate gestures: moving, leaning toward the other, touching, trembling ... those gestures that attest to an intimate communication that needs no words."

David Murray also weaves the spirit into his works. In his artist statement, he writes: "Light is the amniotic fluid of the spirit; it reveals and hides places of mystery and history. The rocks, trees, and waters emanate inner-life. We are welcomed in these landscapes to seek moments of solace and connectedness. It is an invitation to find intimations of something endless and beautiful while keeping our feet on the ground.

"Landscape has meant many different things to me over time. My current efforts continue to explore landscape as a place of life and spirit. I am interested in moments where nature offers a kind of transcendence or alignment. A place where the lands are filtered through emotion, memory, and imagination. These lands are a hybrid, inseparable from humanity but asking us to remember something pure and of power."

If we look at Murray's *Ghost Wind*, we see an aperture of light flowing through and illuminating a rocky coastline. The image is surreal because the backside of the bluff, which should be in shadow, is illuminated by the light. The colors are believable in this landscape, but not so with all of his landscapes.

*Greener Grass* has anything but green grass. There is a slender waterfall cutting through the composition, suggesting a feminine influence. The rocks in the foreground provide the sharp contrast to the softer background images. The colors are purples, blues, and grays, not the natural ones we might expect.

Several of David Murray's paintings are quite good, capturing the feeling of transcendence or alignment that he is striving to portray. His compositions often add a contrasting element, like the aperture of light in *Ghost Wind*, or the foreground rock in *Keystone*. His work is at its best when it departs from reality and moves toward surreal abstraction.