

Minnesota Artist's Gift to His Granddaughter is Also a Gift to Fans of His Work

By Rachel M. Anderson, Contributing Writer

(Bemidji) - Like most artists, Marley Kaul of Bemidji, Minn., spends a lot of time in his studio. However, drawing and painting isn't all he does there.

"I do a lot of reading, listening to music, and thinking, and sometimes the thinking connects with the deep past and sometimes with the present," said the former Bemidji State University (BSU) art professor.

About 12 years ago while dealing with a health scare, Kaul started writing letters to his unborn granddaughter, Isabella. He says around that time he began to think about his own mortality, and wanted to make sure his granddaughter would know about him and his work if he wasn't around to share that knowledge with her.

Kaul wrote his first letter to Isabella while working on a large painting that included a cabinet with an open drawer. "There was nothing in the drawer at that stage. I thought maybe I should inform this grandchild about what I'm up to in this painting."

It wasn't long before Kaul had a large stack of letters, one to accompany each of the paintings he worked on while his daughter was pregnant—and then some. Isabella is now almost 12-years-old, and many of the letters her grandfather wrote to her over the years have been turned into a lasting treasure not only for her to enjoy, but for fans of her grandfather's work as well.

Mill Studio Press of Bemidji, Minn., released the book *Letters to Isabella, Paintings by Marley Kaul* in Fall 2015. The book features 77 images of Kaul's egg tempera paintings, each paired with the letter he wrote to Isabella, sometimes while working on the piece. Egg tempera is a process in which egg yolk is mixed with water and pigment. It is an ancient media found in early Egyptian sarcophagi, as well as 14th and 15th Century Italian artistic paintings.

In the letters, Kaul shares his artistic process and the influences reflected in his work. He also writes about growing up in the southern Minnesota farming community of Good Thunder, of how he met Isabella's grandmother, Sandy, of where he gets ideas for his paintings, and of the many birds and animals that frequently visit his yard.

Accompanying the painting titled "Waiting for the Petals to Falls II," which features a bowl filled with flower petals under a stand of poppies, Kaul writes, "Some years ago I read about a Buddhist monk who placed a cloth under a flower and waited for petals to fall. The monk could not take anything and could only receive and so he waited. I placed a container made from birch bark under the plant in the painting. It honors the indigenous peoples and is connected with my northern earth."

In addition to painting natural forms found near his farm, he arranges objects of interest to develop a narrative or dialogue for the viewer. Kaul estimates he has completed 90 egg tempera paintings and over 350 acrylic, gouache and casein paintings during an art career that began back in the 1960s. Kaul is retired now, but spent 30 years teaching painting and drawing at Bemidji State University.



Letters

TO ISABELLA

PAINTINGS BY MARLEY KAUL

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His paintings reside in private and public collections, including The North Dakota Museum of Art, Plains Art Museum, Minnesota Historical Society, 3M Collections, Minnesota Mutual Life, Tweed Museum of Art, Weisman Art Museum, the First Bank System and the Anderson Center.

Now that ***Letters to Isabella, Paintings by Marley Kaul*** is published, Kaul's next project is to catalog his remaining work. "We plan to get started this winter looking at over 350 of my acrylic, gouache, and casein paintings. We will prioritize them and I will select work that best represents what I did that decade," said Kaul, who plans to dedicate his second book to his other granddaughter, 8-year-old Julia.

"I see this as something of a retrospective. It will be something my kids and grandkids can treasure, and I hope painters and others will consider as a resource in the future," added Kaul.

The reviews for Kaul's retrospective have been very favorable. Robert Hedin, poet, author, past publisher of the Great River Review, and currently the director of the Anderson Center in Red Wing, Minn., said, "*Letters to Isabella* is a stunning and deeply felt book, beautiful in both writing and image..."

"Marley Kaul is a contemporary egg tempera master ... His work in both content and energy emphasizes his connection with natural forms and poetic metaphor," said Laurel Reuter, author, editor, and director of the North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

For more information about Marley Kaul's work, or to purchase a copy of ***Letters to Isabella, Paintings by Marley Kaul***, visit the website, www.marleykaul.com. The book is also available for purchase on Amazon.com, at the Watermark Art Center in Bemidji, or by contacting the publisher at millstudiopress@midco.net

About the Author

Marley Kaul and his wife, Sandy, live in Bemidji, Minn. The Kauls have two children, Steve Kaul and Allison DeLeone. Their daughter and her husband, Chris, have two children, Isabella and Julia. Their son's family includes his partner, Christine, and her children Amber and Wiley.

Since retiring from his job as an art professor at Bemidji State University in 1997, Kaul has spent most of his days in his studio pursuing his passion to paint.



EDITOR'S NOTE: To arrange an interview with Marley Kaul, and/or request a review copy of ***Letters to Isabella, Paintings by Marley Kaul***, contact Rachel M. Anderson, Publicist, at 952- 240-2513 or rachel@rmapublicity.com. High-resolution photography is also available for free upon request.

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