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KIM JONES

AVERNO



# KIM JONES

## Averno

A small crater lake in Southern Italy, considered by Ancient Romans to be the entrance to the underworld.

Essay by Kim Levin

## PIEROGI

**KIM JONES in Conversation with SUSAN SWENSON**

Brooklyn, August 22, 2012

**SS:** You were talking about the title of your new group of work, *Averno*, after a book of poems by Louise Glück, referencing Averno Lake, a volcanic, crater lake that the Ancient Romans believed to be the entrance to the underworld, or hell. You mentioned that you consider that a possible entrance point to your work as well. Could you elaborate on that?

**KJ:** For me, it's very difficult to describe this series of drawings because they range from the early seventies to the present, and they're a combination of drawings and paintings over photographs, mostly of myself performing, and also more pure drawings with no photographs. I like that title. Frankly, I'm not sure how to describe these pieces because there's a great variety. A lot of my work comes out of looking at older artists, long dead artists, from the Renaissance up to the Ashcan School. I remember the first time, when I was in high school, seeing Renoir and the Impressionist paintings and then seeing John Sloan and Robert Henry from the Ashcan school and I remember being really impressed by that and learning from that and knowing more and more about the Renaissance artists from Tintoretto to Tiepolo, [Giovanni] Battista, and even his son [Giovanni] Domenico. So all of these things, in addition to my own life experiences and the people that I've met, faces that I've seen, I think get transferred into the faces of the people who inhabit these drawings. It all gets mixed up and sort of spit out in a certain way. I've looked at this work starting about fifty years ago, since high school. I used to make copies of Rembrandts early on and lately I've been trying to copy a few Tiepolos, which are incredibly hard. Rembrandt is hard too, but I've found I can look at these paintings and drawings but it's different if you try to copy it because it forces you to look and to actually see what you're looking at. If you just look at it, you can see a certain amount of things. If you look at it over and over again. If you try to copy these, aside from the skill you need to copy it, it makes you, forces you, to pick out not just the details but how everything relates and it's very difficult to get the proportions right and you can see that immediately when you try to copy things. I can see it with things I try to do, aside from just the touch the artist had, it's very difficult, you can't really repeat it.

**SS:** You're trying to technically reproduce what they did but also trying to see the way they saw.

**KJ:** Yeah, there are certain paintings, for example *The Tempest* by Giorgione. I still really love his work but I remember the first time I saw that painting in Venice in the eighties, it was so small. I remembered it from art history classes as a slide. Suddenly I was confronted by this painting in kind of a dingy space, all by itself and you could look at that painting and you know, it was almost too much.



**SS:** When you're studying art history and looking at pictures of paintings in books they take on a mythic, larger-than-life scale.

**KJ:** Right, and you don't always see the right colors and usually, well now with the digital camera you can see a lot, but even with the digital camera they don't always capture the right colors.

**SS:** Isn't that the way that many artists used to train? They would travel to see a painting by an artist they liked and try to copy it?

**KJ:** Right. I had a very traditional art education. First, I got a small scholarship to Art Center School for one semester and I took drawing classes there on Saturdays when I was in high school, in '61 or '62. They were very traditional. It was mostly a commercial art school. They didn't put up with you expressing yourself. Chouinard's was more about that, but Art Center was very strict, how to draw the figure and the proportion, drawing from skeletons, drawing from plaster statues. It was actually too strict. I couldn't deal with it.

**SS:** Your work is very contemporary but your references span centuries, even the way the figure is beautifully rendered. Well, not beautifully rendered because it's a complicated image sometimes made simply with a line...

**KJ:** Beautifully rendered is okay, that's fine (laughs).

**SS:** I don't mean rendered in a conventional way, but with a spontaneous, elegant line unique to you.

**KJ:** Well, I think people don't always talk about that ... the current show of Ellsworth Kelly's plant drawings, with a very elegant beautiful line, and some of the earlier studies of plants, bizarre almost realist looking things at the Met and a number of artists, like Jasper Johns, use beautiful lines, but for me line is a very important thing. It's not just ... you can use it to describe a form, whether it's a figure or something you're not quite sure what it is. These drawings that I do are entirely different from the so-called war drawings, which are like maps but they aren't really maps, if you think of a map as a map of New York or LA or Venice. These are maps of something that's in my head, but they have to be very clear like a map, it has to show where everything is, but they're moving maps. I erase and move the white and black tanks and the x's and the dots around their two-dimensional world. Those end up being very beautiful lines. That's because I've been drawing for a long time but I'm not really concerned about aesthetics with those drawings.

**SS:** Like a map of activity.

**KJ:** Right, and the so-called figurative drawings are more concerned about, well, I don't consciously think about Tiepolo or Tintoretto, but they're in my head which I

can't help, so that comes out.

**SS:** You mentioned before that, included in a number of drawings you've done, particularly in the last group that you showed at Pierogi, were some of the earliest drawings you had made in high school.

**KJ:** Right in '60, '61 or so.

**SS:** With new lines laid on top of and incorporated into the older ones. I remember you saying that one of the interesting things for you has been seeing the difference in your hand from that age to now and how it's evolved and become much more assured.

**KJ:** Well that's something I think that probably any artist who's honest with him or herself can say. When I first started drawing with pen and ink it seemed like I didn't have to work very hard, it was a natural thing, there was no hesitation, it was immediate, like a duck to water. I wasn't really afraid of it. But at that point when I was seventeen or eighteen I didn't have that confidence. Even in my twenties and thirties, I had more confidence but there's a difference between a drawing done when I was eighteen or nineteen and a drawing done now that I'm in my sixties. It was about fear. I'm still filled with fear, but I have a lot more confidence in drawing and not thinking about mistakes. It's something I've thought about for a long time. You can't really make mistakes at a certain point. Of course there are quite a few drawings that you try to save but they end up in the trash can, unfortunately.

**SS:** It seems that most artists don't necessarily want to expose that. They want to move away from their earlier efforts. Works that you're making now, drawn and painted on top of your older drawings, retain some the earlier, more hesitant marks exposing the comparison. I don't know of anyone else who does that in the same way.

**KJ:** I'm not sure... I mean, I have drawings that I've just done in 2012, but I think it's very difficult for anybody to be completely honest, for many reasons. I try to be as straight or honest as possible, as far as things that have influenced me, not for anybody else but just for myself, I know where things are coming from. In the early sixties I remember looking at the Aztec and Meztec Codices. All these different kinds of cartoon cells of their rituals. These little men with squiggly things on their backs. I remember being fascinated with those when I was nineteen or twenty.

I was already out of high school when I got that small scholarship to Art Center School in 1962, and I went to Santa Monica Junior College and took academic classes and I also took art classes there. Then I went to Chouinard [Art Institute] in '64 for two years, and that's where I really started to struggle because at that time at Chouinard the hip art was minimalism, Robert Irwin, McCracken and all the rest. All of my teachers hated my drawings because I was still stuck in the Renaissance, up to John Sloan or Degas. I was trying to draw like that and I didn't really have the self-confidence or even the skill to challenge these professors. They would get mad at me, and say 'stop cross-



hatching.' I remember how they made fun of me. I was very confused and was rebelling in my own way I think. In '66 I joined the Marines because at that time everyone was being drafted. I was in the Marines from '66 to '69 and then when I got out I went back to Chouinard and, by that time, I'd grown up a little bit and had more confidence in my drawing ability and started drawing and painting and it was much better at that time.

**SS:** That's something difficult for artists to negotiate because most are just trying to make their artwork, but at the same time they're trying to engage with the art world and have people see their work and show their work. It puts you as an artist in a difficult position if you don't fit in with the current curatorial or critical trends, even if things are much more fragmented than they used to be. You have to stick firmly to what you believe, without much encouragement sometimes.

**KJ:** Yeah, I think a lot if it is just a matter of luck. I mean, I was raised in LA so I was pretty much stuck with the LA art scene. If I was raised in New York it might have been different, I don't know. But if you're raised in the Midwest you're kind of stuck there, and if you stay there then you're really stuck. So that's why people move to New York or wherever, it's just a matter of luck, being in the right place at the right time.

**SS:** Right, well I guess that's something personal.

**KJ:** Yeah.

**SS:** The war drawings are a mapping of activity that you're describing, whereas the other drawings and paintings are mapping your process, or psyche.

**KJ:** They're more connected to art history. The war drawings I don't think are connected to art history. They're about a game, a very serious game in my mind but still a game with a structure. It's a more or less rigid structure. I'm not sure if rigid is the right word, but they have a certain formula, certain rules that I've made up that they have to follow. The other drawings are wide open, whatever is going on in my head, whatever sexual, violence, but also just dreams or things in general that are occurring. You could also relate them to African, Polynesian, or Mexican art, all of these things are just jumbled together with Western European art, and also Chinese and Japanese drawings... all those things sort of bunch up in my head and selectively come out.

**SS:** I always find it was interesting that you're influenced by everything from Renaissance Art to Aztec and Meztec Codices, but also Disney comics. I remember you saying that cartoons were one of the first things you tried drawing.

**KJ:** Yeah, as a child...

**SS:** ...growing up in California.

**KJ:** Growing up in California, comic books were, more or less, my literary education. Disney comics especially. I was drawing Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck – Donald Duck was always difficult because his bill was hard to draw – Lady and the Tramp... Actually all the way through high school I wanted to be a cartoonist until at some point I finally realized I didn't want to make cartoons.

**SS:** I don't see that in your work as much as the other references.

**KJ:** Well, I pretty much erased a lot of Disney. I don't think Walt Disney would be very happy with my work now.

**SS:** Disney comics are one thing, but a lot of other comics and cartoons are very dark, very humorous.

**KJ:** Yeah, in the sixties that all changed. I think even the first Mickey Mouse was more rat looking, but of course Walt Disney had this whole idea – sort of like the Ozzie and Harriet idea of the fifties and the early sixties – of America and this good, nuclear family... mom, dad and two kids, with no problems, and I grew up that way. I grew up believing all that, and my family was a little like Ozzie and Harriet. I had a sister, mom and dad, very middle-class, nice little family. And of course in the mid-sixties all of that suddenly changed with the Vietnam War and long hair and The Beatles, The Stones, and this culture, and it was part of my waking up. You realized things weren't quite as nice as you'd thought.

**SS:** The American idea or ideal at that time was so particular and it didn't leave any room for anything else, so all of that had to come out somewhere.

**KJ:** Yeah, both of us probably, and you're much younger, but it was a white, middle-class childhood and obviously I know for many other people in America at that time, it wasn't the same. It was awful. I know I had a very protected childhood. I'm just getting back to all this other art that is another aspect of my experience.

**SS:** You began to filter all of those images.

**KJ:** Yeah those images start to come out I guess.

**SS:** In Louise Glück's book, *Averno*, there's a poem called "Crater Lake." In it she writes, "There was a war between good and evil, we decided to call the body good, and that made death evil. It turned the soul against death completely." In this book the crater, besides being a point of transition between two worlds, is the only source of light and heat in a desolate landscape. Virgil and a number of other poets have referenced this geographical site as well. In his poem, "Aeneid," Virgil represented it as the entrance to Hades. He considered it a demonic place, a point of connection



between the land of the living and the land of the dead. Both he and Glück suggest, though, that it is not simply an entrance to the underworld but is a point of connection between the underworld and the earthly plane, although not necessarily one that invites accord between the two worlds.

**KJ:** I think she also talks about how there are three levels: Heaven, Earth, and the underworld. And there are these different connections but, in a certain sense as you're talking about it, for me to interpret Louise Glück or Virgil, I wouldn't want to do that. But when you're drawing, it's like a living thing making this mark, which is actually dead...

**SS:** The mark is dead once it's made.

**KJ:** Yeah, once it's made it's dead. There's something there... maybe it's all bullshit, I don't know.

**SS:** What made you first move from drawing to the performance work?

**KJ:** It was around '72 when I was in graduate school at Otis. From around '69-'72 I was painting some abstract things but mostly frogs with big purple penises, flying and smoking, frogs with big breasts, naked frogs basically. They were aggressive and sexual, in sort of happy colors, probably influenced by [Chaim] Soutine or some Expressionist, maybe a bit of Francis Bacon but mostly Soutine, with very loose brush strokes. And then there was a certain point where I was too good at it; it was too easy to do that frog painting. I ended up rolling a bunch of them up. I think I sold a few. I don't know where they are now, somebody stole one from my studio at Chouinard's. Then when I went to graduate school in '72 I got bored with it and stopped. There was one art teacher, Vincent Robbins, who was one of my advisors at Otis in the graduate class, and he said "Kim, why are you competing with a couple of thousand years of painters? Why don't you just try doing installation or performance art?" And around '72 I read the article in *Time Magazine* by Robert Hughes about the Viennese artist, Hermann Nitsch, and all those guys. I also started reading about Eva Hesse, and I knew about Robert Morris and Bruce Nauman, and I started looking more closely at his work, and Vito Acconci and Chris Burden, who were doing their own performances. So I became much more aware of all of these things that were happening in Europe and New York mostly, and I thought wow this is really great. I started investigating materials like tar, foam rubber, wax, cheesecloth, and I began making sculpture out of that, and from there it was around '73 when I started to attach them to my body to activate them more. My girlfriend at the time took photographs of me, mostly on the roof of a studio I had in Venice [CA], or in a friend's apartment, of me attaching various sculptures that I had made out of bamboo, cheesecloth, wax, foam rubber, onto my body, and then from there in late '74 I made the first structure. I started to wear it around Venice and Santa Monica. Everybody knew me in Venice, because of my long hair I looked very weird.



**SS:** Most people didn't have long hair then?

**KJ:** Most people did but at that time my hair was very thick and bushy...

**SS:** Jesus-like?

**KJ:** Very Jesus-like, sort of crazy guy. So, even though I was actually very timid, I was pretty much accepted by all the bikers and the drug-dealers and the psychopaths. They were all kind of like 'that's just crazy Kim' walking around with mud and sticks attached to him in Venice. I was just like one of them in their minds, so it was fairly easy for me to do it there. That environment was actually fairly accepting of my presence. I probably could've gotten away with it in New York, maybe, but a lot of my getting way with it at that time was because the locals there just put up with me. By the time I moved to New York in '82 and I started doing it first in SoHo, near all the art galleries, it was more acceptable to be a crazy artist I guess. But in the early seventies, even when I did the Wilshire Boulevard walk in '76, the cops stopped me, but they didn't arrest me. I was afraid of that. I did a lot of walks, maybe once a week. In '79, for 80 Langton Street, I walked across the Golden Gate Bridge from sunrise to sunset. I was a lot stronger then. I did twelve hour pieces. When I walked through San Francisco most of the people who really got into it were homeless types. There was one guy who followed me on Market Street saying "this guy's from Jupiter." He really loved me. It depends on where you did it. If I did it in the Midwest or in Missouri or somewhere maybe they would've shot me or something.

**SS:** So you were reading more about European and New York performance artists than artists you experienced first-hand in California?

**KJ:** No, I hadn't met the performance people [in LA]. I knew about Barbara Smith and maybe a couple of others in LA. In 1978 Barbara Smith invited me to do a performance at LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art]. I did a performance there with Paul McCarthy and Linda Montano. That's where I met Paul and Barbara Smith. Barbara is great. She's one of those people who helped Chris Burden early on. She was part of F Space, where Chris Burden did his shoot piece, and I also met Nancy Buchanan. Barbara helped me and a lot of other artists, she helped Paul McCarthy early on. So suddenly I was part of the performance art scene, and in '78 *High Performance* magazine started, so I met the people through that. *High Performance* basically saved performance art in certain ways. You'd just send in black and white photographs of your performance and text describing the performance and they'd give you two pages in the magazine. There was no editing. That section of the magazine was called "Artist Chronicles." It just had to be that you'd done the performance during that year and they'd publish it. It went on for quite a long time, until the eighties.

There were a lot of things happening in LA and San Francisco that weren't really talked about. I mean in New York and in Europe there were magazines and critics that were talking about it but in LA you'd do these pieces and your friends would see them. Even

if you had a show everybody would come look at it but that was it. That's part of what I'm talking about. Being in the right place at the right time. The first performance I did where the art world actually paid attention was with Carp, which was run by Barbara Burden and Marilyn Nix. They sponsored performances by various artists, including Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, Alexis Smith. I felt very lucky that they noticed my work and asked me to do a performance. I talked about doing the Wilshire Boulevard Walk, and my first idea was that I wanted to do it at night, from sunset to sunrise, the eighteen miles. I think it was Barbara Burden who said "Why don't you do it twice?" So I said okay and I did it on January 28 – which is my birthday – 1976, from sunrise to sunset, from East to West on Wilshire Boulevard, which is eighteen miles. And a week later, on February 4, I did it from sunset to sunrise, through the night, so it was the full span. At first we got out a map and we thought about all the logistics of doing that piece and thought about hiring a photographer and a film crew, but we realized it'd just be a film shoot if they followed me the whole way. It would just be a film. So we decided not to do that and to just have the photographer meet me at different parts of Wilshire Boulevard and snap the photographs get back in his car and meet me a few miles later. We also thought about asking the police for permission because we worried I'd be arrested at some point, for being weird I guess. We immediately all agreed that that was giving too much power to the state to ask for permission, so we just did it. I had my ID and I thought okay, this is an art show, this is my driver's license, so we didn't ask for any permission. The only problem was during the daytime walk, when I got to Beverly Hills on Wilshire Boulevard I stopped in front of the Wells Fargo bank and lifted the pantyhose up and had the structure off and had my long hair sort of leaking out of the pantyhose which was stretched out and I was surrounded by five cop cars and heard "Okay son, what's going on?" I explained and they said "Okay, just keep walking," they didn't want to deal with it.

**SS:** Just don't stop in front of the bank (laughs).

**KJ:** Yeah, I was this muddy guy, 'all right just keep walking.' So it was fine. But the date is important. I've used that date at different points and January 28 is important to me because it's my birthday. By coincidence I came back from overseas and flew into El Toro Marine Base in California on January 28, 1968. It was just a coincidence that I came back from overseas on my birthday. That is important to me.

**SS:** So it was eight years later, in '76, that you did the Wilshire Boulevard Walks.

**KJ:** Yeah, I guess it was.

**SS:** You said you were in the Marines from '66 to '69. And you were in Vietnam.

**KJ:** Yeah, I joined the Marines in June of '66 and I got out three months early in April of '69. The tour of duty was thirteen months. I went over on January 1, 1967. They took us on a troop ship, called the S.S. Walker, and I think it took 25 days to go across. We landed in Okinawa, where we stayed for a few months. Then I joined up with the 9th



Marine Amphibious Brigade, and from there I joined up with 3-4, a battalion landing team. We took a small ship from Okinawa to Dong Ha, and then went up river to the Marine Base in Dong Ha. That's where I was stationed. So that's my military experience.

**SS:** You mentioned when you were talking about the Aztec and Mezttec Codices that some of the drawings include figures wearing strange objects on their backs and that you had seen those as early as the 1960s.

**KJ:** In 1962 or 1963 I remember reading about them in the college library at Santa Monica and seeing photographs in the various books they had about Mexican and Central American art.

**SS:** Did you think about any of those things when you first started developing the structure?

**KJ:** I remember being really fascinated by those things but I didn't really make the connection with my art for a long time, until the early seventies when it started to make more sense. I was looking at them and it sunk in, and a lot of African art that I would look at just sort of seemed interesting to me but I didn't actively try to use it in my art. I was more obsessed with Renaissance art at that time.

**SS:** So when you started making those structures it wasn't a conscious thought?

**KJ:** Well, when I started making sculptures I was more influenced by Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and Bruce Nauman and performances by artists like Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, and early Bruce Nauman. In January 1968, when they sent me on R&R, called "Rest and Recreation." They give you five days where you can go wherever you want. I chose Hong Kong. I remember seeing the scaffolding for the skyscrapers. It's all bamboo, or it was. Apparently it's very safe and it's really beautiful. I remember being fascinated by that but I couldn't quite connect it to my art. When I came back in the seventies, after I got out of the service and was back in school, I remember looking at the star maps that the Polynesians, the Marshall Islanders made. They made bamboo or wood structures like a map of the waves and the currents and the stars, and they used them on their boats to go from island to island. It was a structure that was tied together, and made of bamboo or thin wood, like a lattice.

**SS:** They would use these as a kind of map?

**KJ:** I think it would show where a star was in relation to the current and the island positions, and they would have to memorize these things. That's apparently how they were able to go from island to island. At the Met there's one of these star maps from the Marshall Islands that I have a photograph of.

**SS:** And that was something that you saw afterwards? It wasn't something you saw

**KJ:** Actually, my friend Megan took photographs and she said she was a little surprised at how fast I was, but the second time I did it she was ready for me.

**SS:** It's different too based on the environment that you're doing it in and the kind of audience you have. For the first performances that you did the audience was whoever happened to be on the streets. This recent one was the same in that the audience was whoever happened to be there. But it was done in Chelsea in Manhattan where there are lots of galleries, and people's awareness of art and performance art has changed to the degree that some people were really surprised and reacted as if thinking, 'what's going on?' but other people were like 'oh, it's an art happening.'

**KJ:** Yeah that's the obvious difference between doing it in a museum or gallery where people just say 'oh this is art' so it's fine, and doing it in SoHo in the early eighties, it was a little weird but it's art so it's fine. But when I did it in Chinatown I had older Chinese people looking at me like 'what the fuck is that' and laughing at me. When I did it in San Francisco, on the way back to 80 Langton Street, it was the end of the day, this was in '79, most of the people that saw it were not artists they were just people on the street in San Francisco. There were different reactions. Mostly friendly reactions. I remember coming back from doing that piece. It was getting dark, I was walking back to 80 Langton Street and it was a pretty rough neighborhood. I saw these two very large bikers sitting on the stoop across the street, and I remember walking by and thinking 'oh shit, these guys are gonna give me a hard time.' I was just trying to walk by, trying to be inconspicuous with this big structure on me. I heard this voice growl at me "hey, hey you." I turned around and said "yes?" and I heard, "I respect you. Anyone that walks around like that I respect." I said "thank you" and I continued walking and was thankful they didn't decide to beat me up. They didn't really care much about art I don't think. They probably thought I was just some crazy guy and they liked the way I looked I guess.

**SS:** Like somebody not trying to fit in.

**KJ:** I guess, walking around like that I look like an outsider even though I'm part of the art world. I guess, I don't know, bikers feel like they're outsiders. Certainly they're not part of the main stream, working in a bank.

**SS:** And they've chosen to be outsiders.

**KJ:** Yes. I can imagine they chose their lifestyles and they looked at me and said 'there's somebody else who chose his lifestyle. I respect that.' But you know each case is different. When I did it in Germany in Hamburg, there were these art clubs. The great thing about Europe is there are older and younger people in these art clubs, and there were these little old ladies looking up at me when I was doing a performance and they would ask me really polite questions and were just curious about this mudman standing before them. It really depends on where you are.



being destroyed which I've done with several pieces. Usually I'll save my work but that's another way of working and making art.

**SS:** You recently did a performance for a show at Barbara Gladstone Gallery ["The Spirit Level"], curated by Ugo Rondinone. That was the first one you had done since...

**KJ:** I think the last time I did it was at the Henry Gallery in Seattle.

**SS:** You did that performance in the museum only and didn't go outside, right?

**KJ:** Right, that was only inside the museum. But for the one that was part of the group show at Barbara Gladstone Gallery, I walked back and forth between her 21st Street and 24th Street galleries. So the last one was in 2012.

**SS:** You doing a performance like that is a bit like working over the drawings that you started so many years ago. You're doing the performance now but it's built upon the earlier ones and is different now.

**KJ:** Yeah, this is what I've talked about, probably influenced by the paintings that Rembrandt did of himself as a young man and then himself as an older man. I started doing performances when I was around 29 or 30. The difference between my body when I was 29 or 30 and my body now when I'm 68, is quite big. I'm weaker and the body changes, everything changes. I like that idea. It's the same performance, the same person, but a different body.

**SS:** You did a good job though!

**KJ:** Thank you. I couldn't do it for twelve hours, though.

**SS:** It took twelve hours to go eighteen miles, and you stopped once in a while.

**KJ:** Yeah, I stopped. The thing I realized after doing the twelve-hour piece, it was almost like I was on a train. It was actually, in a certain way kind of easy, because I was only going a few miles an hour. But when I stopped to rest it was like I was getting off the train and resting, and then getting back on. Whenever I do the performances, I'm usually thinking, 'why the fuck am I doing this again, this is such a pain in the butt' and afterwards I'm tired and I'm glad it's over. But when I'm doing it, I almost get into some kind of trance, its almost like taking drugs, I think. Trance is the only word I can think of. In a way it was almost the same feeling when I did it in April 2012, it was much shorter, only a few blocks back and forth, but still it was that kind of excitement and the dread before I did it. And once I was into it this trance, and bringing back the thought of how your mind is becoming a sculpture I guess, at least in my mind.

**SS:** It seemed, by the way you were moving, that you got a momentum going and you didn't want to lose that momentum.

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**KJ:** I guess, walking around like that I look like an outsider even though I'm part of the art world. I guess, I don't know, bikers feel like they're outsiders. Certainly they're not part of the main stream, working in a bank.

**SS:** And they've chosen to be outsiders.

**KJ:** Yes. I can imagine they chose their lifestyles and they looked at me and said 'there's somebody else who chose his lifestyle. I respect that.' But you know each case is different. When I did it in Germany in Hamburg, there were these art clubs. The great thing about Europe is there are older and younger people in these art clubs, and there were these little old ladies looking up at me when I was doing a performance and they would ask me really polite questions and were just curious about this mudman standing before them. It really depends on where you are.



**SS:** A certain maturity is knowing that you can do something new and you don't have to throw everything away. You don't have to throw away the old things just because you want to move forward.

**KJ:** Yeah, I think that's part of why it took me a long time to get the skill and the confidence to do what I wanted to do. That doesn't mean you'll be successful or not, it doesn't even mean you'll make good art, but at least in the last five or ten years or so, I feel I have much more confidence in my line than I did before. I remember I read something about Hokusai, I think he lived to be in his nineties, but just before he died he said 'if I could only live another ten years, I would be able to draw even better.' And he was a pretty amazing artist anyhow. That's why I love to draw.

**SS:** That's an interesting thing about today as compared to, well the sixties, a time of enormous change and upheaval. Which I guess you had to, everyone had to go through that in order to let go of so many outdated ways, but now we've come to the point where we can reincorporate worthwhile things from the past. Now things seem to be more openly a mix of old and new.

**KJ:** Yeah, now there are obviously a lot more artists. I don't think there's any one style, not that I know of.

**SS:** When we were talking yesterday about using this image as the book cover, you were saying that mudman made these drawings. Do you think about it in that way?

**KJ:** Yeah, it's not like I made the drawings when I had mud all over me and I was wearing the stick structure. But it was... it was mudman, it's me basically, it's Kim. I just have a different set of clothes on, so it's like a walking sculpture but it's still me. Just like the drawings are a part of me. I suppose there's a certain amount of anger in me, but that's just what I think about.

**SS:** Well, I always think of them as being beautiful.

**KJ:** Well that's good, that's how I think of them. Some people have a hard time with that. They used to think that Impressionist paintings were of people with a skin disease.