



Compass Rose

Literature and Art Journal

COMPASS ROSE interviews Eva Sutton

Compass Rose: *The role of identity awareness seems to be a reoccurring theme in your work, especially in Hybrids and Dossier 21b. How do you see that concept adding to your art, and why do you think you are so drawn to it?*

Eva Sutton: Identity, whether in the biological, psychological or social sense is something that always seems to be profoundly important to us as human beings. The question, “Who am I?” or, in the broader sense, “Who are we?” is fundamental to human existence and it always will be. For me, it’s a very rich place to make work, conceptually speaking.

CR: *What are your views on identity re-creation such as cosmetic surgery? What do you feel is the perceived need for such a change?*

Sutton: I suppose that all surgery that is strictly cosmetic has to do with conformity to some social norm of what is beautiful or acceptable. Although I’d rather see social norms being redefined to include broader definitions of beauty, I don’t think its reprehensible to “fix” something that makes you unhappy about your appearance, as long as it doesn’t become an addiction. Its important to realize though, that having a nose job or liposuction can’t really “change your life.” It’s only a surface fix and one has to be clear about that.

CR: *What first drew your interest in molecular biology and genetic engineering?*

Sutton: I have a science background, specifically as a software engineer. But even before becoming a programmer, I was always interested in science and the scientific method, partly because I come from a medical family where science was part of the daily discourse. I briefly worked with a group of electrical engineers designing systems for genetic analysis that also helped spark a deep interest in genetics and microbiology.

CR: *In a previous interview, you had attested that we were very swiftly encroaching on the creation of the first human clone. How do you feel this will change society?*

Sutton: I think that there’s a lot of hysteria associated with cloning, especially human cloning. It’s a lot like the situation a few decades ago with in-vitro fertilization, then referred to as creating “test-tube babies.” When the first of these babies were born, everyone stood back expectantly with baited breath. What would these new-fangled babies be like? As it turns out, they were exactly like other babies—once they were born, they needed food, warmth and love just like any other human child. I suspect it will be a similar finale with cloned infants. One a baby exists, it doesn’t much matter where it came from.

CR: *Do you feel that if "Barbie and Ken" clones ever cloned themselves that we would run into issues with an ever-thinning gene pool?*

Sutton: No—not with respect to the overall global gene pool, because the vast majority of people on the planet cannot even afford basic health care, let alone extremely expensive procedures like self-cloning. This is a situation, which I don't foresee changing anytime soon, at least not within my lifetime, so I believe that a diverse human gene pool is secure for the moment. Now, when it comes to gene diversity of animals in the wild, which is another equally important story—I am extremely concerned. But that has more to do with habitat depletion rather than cloning.

CR: *What do you think is the most common misunderstanding surrounding the topic of genetic engineering?*

Sutton: That people think, “the cat can be stuffed back into the bag” once its out. By that I mean that any technology, cloning, nuclear power, artificial intelligence, etc. can be suppressed so that we don't disrupt the status quo. No matter how many laws are passed here in the US or in other countries, it is human nature to explore, experiment and invent, and thus any technology, cloning included, will eventually come to fruition and be applied. Its foolish to think that it won't be so. We, as a society, might as well begin to ask ourselves how, when where and why we can use the technology rather than sticking our head in the sand and ignoring it.

CR: *Do you have a specific process of art creation? If so, what is it? If not, what are some common inspirations between projects?*

Sutton: I typically tend to work on a per-project basis. My approach tends to be “top-down,” meaning that I am attracted to an idea, which I research and familiarize myself with as a concept. I then gather materials to begin to formulate an expression or response to that idea. I've also worked from “the bottom up”, so to speak, meaning that I'll gather a database of images and then figure out what to do with them. Often, both processes overlap.

CR: *Some of your work has reoccurring imagery as well as themes; such as the right hand on the right side of "Construction 12" and "Construction 13." Do you generally create series-style works or primarily stand alone pieces? Why?*

Sutton: I always work in series. I find it enriching to embed each work within a greater conceptual, methodological and aesthetic framework. I can't really evaluate a single piece in isolation.

CR: *Do you feel that your science background enhances your art more, or that your art background enhances your science more? Why?*

Sutton: I consider myself primarily an artist, so it would have to be science influencing art, but ultimately, I think the methodologies are the same. One gets inspired by an idea or something that one happens to observe and then one digs down deeper. I do like the old adage by the philosopher John Dewey about “...science stating meaning and art expressing it.” That is a qualitative difference which still holds true if you think about it.

CR: *Who is your favorite current scientist? Why?*

Sutton: I've always appreciated scientists who have a sense of social responsibility as well as doing original research. Stephen Jay Gould, the late Harvard paleontologist and evolutionary biologist comes to mind, both for his research on "Punctuated Equilibrium", which inspired a work of mine called "Mutations" and for his writings about ecology, extinction and planetary awareness. Edward O.

Wilson, the renowned zoologist, is another favorite. His book "The Future of Life" is a must-read for anyone interested in the current and future relationship between global ecology and global economy. He also offers solutions to current environmental dilemmas—not just doomsday prophecies—which I am grateful for.

CR: *Who is your favorite current artist? Why?*

I always have a pretty broad, eclectic pool of artists that I'm interested in. Names that come to mind at the moment are: Jim Campbell, because he, being both an artist and electrical engineer, crafts beautifully poetic works with customized electronics appropriate to his ideas, but never overwhelming the artistic expression. I also like Catherine Chalmers' photos and videos. She has a very smart way of anthropomorphizing animals, even the lowly cockroach. I'm also recently very interested in the work of straight photographers, mostly those who are focusing on some aspect of the third world/first world divide, since I'm now doing photography again. Ed Burtynsky, Sze Tsung Leong and Alex Webb come to mind.

CR: *What message(s) do you hope to convey on the issues of art and science through your work?*

Sutton: All my work is issue oriented, so it typically seeks to raise awareness about the particular topic or domain of discourse, which I'm exploring at the moment. I also hope to create an emotional response, which varies from humor to something more somber, depending on the topic