

Susan Kealey was diagnosed with chronic leukemia at the age of sixteen. In spite of her condition, she completed high school at seventeen and went on to earn a degree in philosophy from McGill University in Montréal. In 1981, at twenty-two, Kealey underwent the then experimental procedure of a bone marrow transplant. After the doctors advised her to take a year off to recuperate, she instead began a second degree in French translation at the University of Ottawa, and completed it in 1984.

The formal training of the philosopher and translator informs the entirety of Susan Kealey's artwork. She was an exacting writer and high priestess of popular culture. Her photographs were of everyday objects, but Kealey was making works that were not very everyday at all: meaningful, beautiful, strangely independent, and original.

When Susan Kealey applied to the Ontario College of Art (OCA) in the spring of 1985, she began to experience manifestations of graft-versus-host disease, which occurs when the transplanted bone marrow fights the host body. Her eyes suffered corneal abrasions and cataracts and by the fall, she was legally blind. Although no longer able to read print, she was still determined to go to OCA. Kealey was the first blind student admitted to OCA in the department of Experimental Arts. Small or intricate work was out of the question; so she changed the scale and nature of her work, concentrating on painting, sound works, and interdisciplinary projects. When she graduated in 1989, Kealey was awarded the Governor General's Academic Medal for the highest standing in school.

Kealey was circumspect about her medical history, confiding the facts to only a few close friends. Tom Folland notes the "seriousness, but also the absurdity of the art/life dichotomy." ..."Frankly, I kept on forgetting how seriously ill she had been at times and the struggles she continually faced. Susan was tough as nails. She simply had more energy and more strength and determination in her tiny frame than anyone else I knew. She immersed herself completely in every project."

Susan Kealey went on to vigorously embrace everything the art scene had to offer and to inject her remarkable energy into that milieu in Toronto. She curated, wrote, edited, organized, contributed to, hosted, served on boards and committees, and worked at Gallery 44, *Parallellogramme*, *FUSE Magazine*, YYZ Artist's Outlet, Free Parking, CKUA Radio, Images Festival of independent Film and Video, *Mix* and *Lola*. Kealey's interests and scope were as hungrily global as they were local. She sought out and participated in artist residencies first at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany, and then at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Kealey's output of work was prodigious. Her body of work includes several photographic series, installations, film projections, audio and videotapes, work with found material, and screenprinted paintings. Back in Toronto, between 1995 and 1999, Kealey completed five series of works. The photographic series included *The Phenomenology of Licorice*, *Synopses* and *Epilogue*. *People Who Need People* is comprised of 39 stitched canvases and *Bandwidth* is a series of 15 screenprinted paintings. Another two photo series are *The Philosophies of Suburbia*, which was never shown in Canada, and the incomplete *Puzzled Landscapes*, an investigation into the representation of tourist sites.

Pastel musings on how hip and funny life can be, the *Bandwidth* paintings are softer than the earlier works somehow. They would be the last works Susan Kealey would make. She took the names of unknown and perhaps never-to-be-discovered local bands, culled from club listings in weekly entertainment papers, and made from them a series of screenprinted paintings. With her love of language and pop culture and her finger stuck firmly on the zeitgeist, the names must have been irresistible.

*People Who Need People* is a series of small works of found embroidered nametags mounted on colourful fabrics. The series was not shown in Kealey's lifetime. Scott McLeod, publisher of *Prefix Photo*, rightly claims that all of Kealey's work still awaits the critical attention and broad public recognition it truly deserves.