

ARTS & CULTURE | ART

Art Meets Science at the Providence Art Club

A local artist creates for a cure

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Kelly Milukas' art will be displayed at the Providence Art Club this month. PHOTO BY MICHAEL CEVOLI

mortals. The RMF provided her with one clue to get her started: use the visual analogy of keys and locks to show the mysteries of the human body and its ability to cure itself.

Kelly didn't accept right away. For starters, she isn't a scientist or a doctor. She doesn't even play one on TV. What she is, is an artist in every sense of the word. By day, she's at the forefront of the Creative Capital's performing art scene where she's spent a cool 14 years serving as the Director of Concerts for Providence's most prominent playhouse, the Providence Performing Arts Center. By night, (and it seems, every other waking second she has) she's at The Bow House Studio in Tiverton. There, in the studio she owns, she masterfully layers pastels with watercolors to create fiery seascapes, radiant rural retreats and delightfully gritty markets where ordinary apples become as tantalizing as Eve's forbidden fruit. She humbly confides, "I knew they were placing enormous trust in me. I needed to know that I had the passion deep inside to visually translate this medical science into art."

Can you blame her? Regenerative medicine is the stuff that doctors and scientists sign their life away for. Benevolently, they sacrifice their own personal time to ensure future generations receive the best possible treatment and ultimately a cure for life-threatening diseases. It's a complicated solution to a simple yet major health crisis: the shortage of organs.

Pioneers in the field of regenerative medicine reconstruct organs out of stem cells and biomaterials. Brand spankin' new, fully functional organs from the cells of a patient's failed organ. It didn't take Kelly long to accept wholeheartedly.

She began collecting keys and locks, from the ordinary to ornate. She captured the beauty of these inanimate objects and breathed life into them, similar to a doctor giving life to a synthetic material by combining it with stem cells. Her journey took her to unorthodox places, once standing on a train track to photograph several keys, the tracks representing the veins of life and the body's ability to heal itself.

In 2011, *The Keys to the Cure* debuted in Washington D.C. at the Ronald Regan Building and International Trade Center. Kelly displayed her works, comprised of 25 original paintings and fine art photography printed on aluminum. She also courageously addressed a packed room of world-renowned scholars and clinicians explaining that, "Keys have patina, age, wisdom. Locks have mysterious interiors, like our souls. Nature is the background, the canvas a direct link to life. Each key is unique, carrying its own unlockable magic to heal. Science holds the promise to the cure."

Two years later and Kelly's project has come full circle. A once bewildered recipient of a surprise commissioning, she's back at the Providence Art Club as a passionate artist and educator of regenerative medicine. There's no denying that she's hooked. "This visual translation of science seeped into my DNA. All of the possibilities that this science offers our generations, I can't help but be consumed by it. I won't stop until I must," she says.

Milukas, a mad scientist in her own right, has significantly advanced her body of art. Pushing the envelope on materials, she carves stone clayed keys, casts them with resin and gilds them with 23k gold, palladium and Japanese silver. The keys seem to float off of color fields that represent the interiors of our bodies.

The exhibit, premiering April 7 at the Providence Art Club, is a celebratory fusion of art and science. We now have the keys to understand the intricacies of this revolutionary science of regenerative medicine its promise for future generations.

The Keys to the Cure is on display April 7-26. Providence Art Club, 11 Thomas Street. 331-1114.

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Two years ago Kelly Milukas walked into the Providence Art Club to meet an old friend for lunch. An hour later she exited the building stunned. It was as if she'd been given the keys to a gleaming Ferrari 458 Italia. Her thrill lasted seconds before it being bowled over by anxiety. She knew she had to drive home, up College Hill, having no prior experience driving a stick shift. Only Kelly didn't receive a Ferrari. What she received was the proverbial keys.

During lunch, Kelly's friend explained that she was commissioned by the Regenerative Medicine Foundation (RMF) to be the sole artist for their internationally attended Translational Regenerative Medicine Forum.

Say what?

Her mission, if she chose to accept it, was to artistically translate the enigmatic, almost sci-fi science of regenerative medicine to us mere

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