

## Thinking Biggsy

**Danielle Ganek** had just started writing her second novel when she came across a 1962 **Jasper Johns** painting, *Fool's House*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "The title of the painting just jumped out at me," she says. "I thought, 'That's it; that's the name of the house.'"

Fool's House, a tumbledown summer estate in Southampton, New York, is the main setting of Ganek's *The Summer We Read Gatsby*, out this month from Viking Press. The book tells the story of two half sisters who inherit the house from their eccentric aunt.

One of the fools is Biggsy, a prankster artist who spends as much time sucking up to potential patrons as he does making art. Biggsy has been living above the garage at Fool's House, at the invitation of the sisters' aunt. Cassie, the sensible half sister who serves as narrator, says he belongs to "that global breed of tortured artistic souls" who "survived, somehow, feeding off others, without shame or compulsion to achieve."

Ganek, who, with her husband, **David**, is a prominent collector of contemporary art



Collector and art-inspired author **Danielle Ganek**.

and photography, set her first novel, *Lulu Meets God and Doubts Him*, in Chelsea, populating it with fictional artists.

The plot of *The Summer We Read Gatsby* turns on the disappearance from Fool's House of a painting suspected to be by **Jackson Pollock**—it was

"all dabs and dribbles of brown, black, and silver paint" and initialed "J. P." The sisters' investigation takes them to Pollock's former home and studio in East Hampton.

The story reflects the writer's fascination with Pollock. "Everything about him created the vision of what we expect artists to be," she says. But while Ganek and her husband own pieces by **Richard Prince**, **Jeff Koons**, **Slater Bradley**, and **Sam Durant**, they don't have a Pollock. "I missed that party," Ganek explains. "It's another game now." —**Ruth Graham**

## Mane Event

One day, in the offices of the artist-book publisher Arion Press in San Francisco, Kiki

Smith was first suggested using Smith's hair to illustrate the ballad. Smith was



Kiki Smith photocopies her hair with help from Arion Press's Andrew Hoyem.

Smith put her long wavy hair down on the photocopier machine. She and Arion's publisher, Andrew Hoyem, then sat down and selected copies of her strands to go with the 14 stanzas of "I Love My Love" by Helen Adam. In the ballad, a woman enchants, then entraps, her lover with her golden tresses. Even after he murders her, her hair grows wildly from the grave, killing the lover.

It was Hoyem who first suggested using Smith's hair to illustrate the ballad. Smith was sold on the idea once she heard the ballad read at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York. "It resonated and made me laugh a lot," the artist says of the song-poem, which Adam wrote in 1958 and which was based on a Celtic version of the Medusa myth. The imagery of

hair crawling over the house ("It thumped on the roof, it hissed and glowed over every window pane") reminded Smith of some of her projects from 20 years ago, like the films in which her hair is being dragged across the floor or stuck under doors. Smith had also used her hair in early prints. For one work, she photocopied single bits of hair, while for another she used

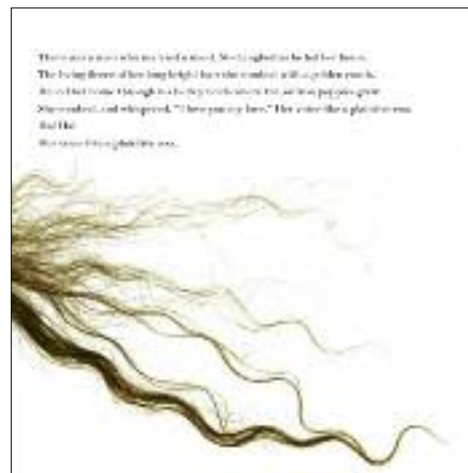
casts of her head, flattened out in the corners with a big swirl of hair in the middle.

Smith considers her own mane intriguing artistic material. "It is about how to make a drawing that is informed by you, but not in a way that comes out of your hand," she says, adding, "It's unpredictable." She calls John Cage, the composer and artist who used chance in his work, "one of my drawing heroes."

Hair also has cultural meaning in her work. "Many women artists use hair as a language to play with. It can be about femininity, sexuality, or conformity," she says. "I use it more in the sense of nonconformity. It represents disobedience,

the uncontrollable, the hag—that's why I love this poem."

Arion has recently completed 75 numbered editions of the book, *I Love My Love*, priced at \$5,000 each. Adam's poem is handset in letterpress type and arranged alongside 16 lithographs of Smith's hair, colored in brown-black, tan,



A panel from *I Love My Love*, Arion Press, 2009. Hair by Smith, poem by Helen Adam.

and yellow-orange tones—a rare sight, since Smith has gray hair and no plans to dye it. —**Amanda Gordon**