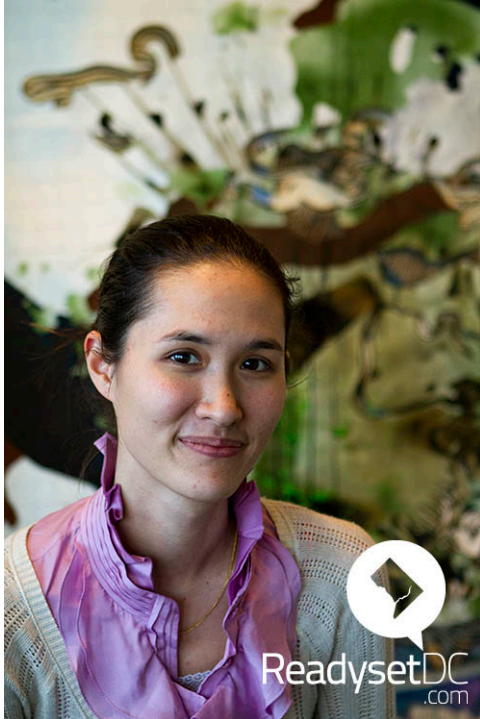


Words w/ Katherine Mann

Reported by [Tracy](#)

I don't believe in the idea of the isolated lonely genius, that's one way to make mediocre art.

[Katherine Mann](#), So Hamiltonian Fellow, invited us into her studio to talk art, science, and inspiration. You can hear Katherine in her own words tomorrow April 14th at 7:30 PM at the [Hamilton Gallery Artist Talk](#), along with Michael Enn Sirvet and Christian Benefiel.



How are you connected to the DC area?

I'm a diplomat kid. So we came back to DC a lot, I grew up abroad and spent a lot of time in suburban Virginia.

So being a diplomat kid, I guess that's had to influence your art in some way.

My art, has a gypsy feeling, I guess. It has a feeling of fragmentation and taking pieces from all these different environments growing up. I spent a lot of time in Asia as a kid, my first formal art training came from traditional sumi painting, think of those traditional Chinese paintings with the black ink, that comes back into my art a lot. It's all based on the foundation of traditional painting.

Did you start out by painting?

Always painting. Never the type of painting that people usually think of, people think of oil painting, I think of ink and water color and acrylic. That goes back to my training really, when I was kid, we'd go back to the Taiwan in the summer, and I'd study the traditional ink wash technique and that comes back into the work a lot, the spontaneity of water and ink, how the two meld together and move around the brush. I'm taking a more abstract approach but it's all based on the foundation of painting.



How'd the relationship with the Hamiltonian begin?

I applied to the Hamiltonian Fellowship twice. I don't think they know that. I heard about the Hamiltonian in grad school at Maryland Institute College of Art. There's not another program like this in the area. This fellowship allows me to see what the gallery circuit is like and allows me a scaffolding of artists to connect with, a network.

What can people expect of your work at the Hamiltonian?

The main goal of my paintings are to create an immersive fantasy environment using an abstract language. Some of the paintings are small or medium sized. The largest piece I've done is 30 feet long, and I like to use large paintings to create this world. I want a person to come up really close to the paintings, and revel in the neurotic minutiae that's in them. I'd also like people to walk and distance themselves further away from the piece. I'd like people to spend time with the pieces. I'd like to create art for people to get lost in.

How do you bring a blank canvas to life?

Its process oriented, my paintings look like puddles on the floor at first. They look like typical abstract expressionist paintings when you first begin. I'm taking some water, some acrylic and ink and splattering them on the canvas allowing these elements to evaporate and turn into stains. This process is a chance operation, spontaneous and organic. When they dry, they look beautiful. It's not because of me, it's because water and ink are beautiful materials I want to build into those. It has a skeleton form that I want to encompass, populate maybe suffocate a little, with the all these characters that get built onto this stain skeleton.



What do you think about DC Arts community?

Washington, DC gets an unfair reputation as an artistic desert. I'm still a newcomer, but I felt really welcome into the arts community.

Any artist we should be keeping an eye on?

There's a bunch of people I went to school with. [Jenny Mullins](#) she is also a watercolor artist but deals also with sculpture and installation. There's [Kim Manfriede](#) I really love her work. Both artists I respect and admire. We've all worked together and inspired each other.

Speaking of inspiration, is there a place in DC you go for inspiration?

The museums, I can bike to all of them. I love the Asian Art Museum and the Freer and Sackler specifically.

Any advice you'd give to aspiring artists.

You've got to keep a community. It provides you opportunities and makes you a better artist. I don't believe in the idea of the isolated lonely genius, that's one way to make mediocre art. Get inspired by others, steal ideas from your peers or get inspired by them.

If you weren't an artist, what would you be doing?

I'd be a scientist. There a lot of overlaps between the art world and the world of science. Both in terms of politics, the way people think, by having this inquiry in the world around us. My boyfriend works for NASA and we talk science all the time. In fact, I know a lot of artists who are dating scientist. So yeah I'd be a scientist.

What do you love about D.C.?

I love how livable it is, I love that I'm able to have this studio on H St., I wake up in the morning and teach, and bike to my studio. I'm living the dream of being an artist. It doesn't have the pressure of New York.

Check out: Katherine Mann, Christian Benefiel, and Michael Enn Sirvet Hamiltonian Gallery, March 27 – May 1, 2010.