



A CONVERSATION WITH MICHELLE Y WILLIAMS

This interview with Michelle Y Williams was conducted by the Matthews Gallery in June 2013.

Being “cloistered in” may be key to Michelle Y Williams’ process, but that doesn’t mean she’s a recluse. Solitude is what the Houston, Texas artist needs to focus her mind and tune in to her subconscious. Her mixed media works are equally inspired by measured decisions and the pure emptiness of the blank surfaces before her. They’re conglomerations of the figurative and the abstract, and boast a subdued palette that echoes the artist’s fascination with rust, crumbling concrete and peeling paint.

When Williams isn’t in her studio, she’s not afraid to step into the spotlight. In September she’ll be featured in Luxe Magazine, and last week she granted an interview to the Matthews Gallery! Michelle told us about everything from her many materials to the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi, a worldview that has taught her to accept her flaws and create with abandon. Here’s what she had to say:

“Inspiration for my work is both selective and completely random,” you write in your artist statement. Is the same true for your choice of materials for a particular piece? How do you select a medium?

The primary medium in my work is acrylic (very quickly after I began as a painter using oils, I realized I have an aversion to cleaning brushes). Pigmented inks have also proven to be an often used medium for me (applied with a dropper, then floated across the canvas using my palette knife).

The choice for other materials, indeed, comes more randomly. Whether I incorporate sand or oil bar or even attaching a piece of torched metal with wax string to the canvas happens naturally & intuitively as the work progresses.

You also talk about a “relationship that develops” between you and your work. Does this change your notion of when a work is completed? Is it sad to say goodbye?

I suppose it’s more of a short-term relationship...shall we call it a fling. I invest energy into a piece which is then reciprocated upon completion, but the real gratification comes when someone has made a connection with my work, which couldn’t happen unless I surrendered it readily.

You prefer to work in solitude. What are some other important parts of your process? Do you listen to music? Do you work on multiple pieces at a time, or just one?



My preference for sequestration is actually paramount - in order to maintain the integrity and authenticity of my work, I eliminate most outside influences that could dull my own creative process. Diverse genres of music can be heard in my studio - from acid jazz to classic rock to classical - while I move between several pieces in various stages of completion.

You mention the importance of seeking a balance in your work. How does that connect with the tenets of wabi-sabi, the Japanese aesthetic that embraces the transient self?

Rather than trying to exert control over a painting, my pursuit of aesthetic balance, (while maintaining my penchant for asymmetry), transpires more instinctively. The absence of obsessing over that quest for balance & the capacity to “let go”, relates to the principles of wabi-sabi.

I found this part of your bio particularly beautiful: “In a stain, we find understanding; in a dent, our ability to heal; in a blemish, an unchained beauty.” Embracing your flaws can be a difficult process. How does your work help you do this?

Quite simply, the alternative to embracing flaws requires far too much negative energy. For me, perfection is boring and I truly find immense beauty in flaws - chips & cracks in tea bowls used in Japanese tea ceremonies or uncut & unpolished rough just-mined diamonds - these things excite and inspire me.

I hear you're quite the humanitarian. What projects are you involved with?

I am an “equal opportunity donator”, giving my work with abandon to many different charitable organizations throughout the year.