

LVL3

Artist of the Week: Amanda Valdez

Amanda Valdez is a Brooklyn based artist, born in Seattle, Washington. She received her MFA from Hunter College in New York City and BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago; additionally she studied at Utrecht University in The Netherlands. Amanda has been the recipient of a Yaddo Artist-in-Residency, MacDowell Colony Artist-in-Residency, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts Artist-in-Residency, and the 2011 College Art Association MFA Professional-Development Fellowship. Recent shows include Taste of Us, solo exhibition at Denny Gallery, Double Down, solo exhibition at Prole Drift, Floater, at BravinLee Projects, Works off Canvas, at Denny Gallery, El Regreso de los Dinosaurios at Abrons Art Center, in New York, Same Same but Different at Parallel Art Space, in Brooklyn, Guest Spot in Baltimore and SOIL Gallery, in Seattle, MsBehavior at The ArtBridge Drawing Room, in New York. Valdez has recently been featured on the Huffington Post, New American Paintings, the Stranger, and Hyperallergic.

Tell us a little about yourself and what you do? For the last five years I've developed a body of paintings that are made with fabric, embroidery, canvas, and paint. My shapes are sewn into the surface of the painting. As my sewing skills grew, I was able to realize my particular shapes in these paintings. To me, this is an interesting way to make a painting. Drawing is essential to finding my shapes. Some, I know specifically where they come from, like the feeling of floating on a lake, or the way a glacier can rest between two crevices, or being a body tangled and smooshed in bed with another body. Others are more mysterious. When I'm drawing and making a painting, I am thinking with an intelligence in my hands and body. This physical intelligence is important to me; it's easy to be separated from it. Yet it's where some primal weird information is stored. I'm trying to reach that space when I draw. My studio is in



Amanda Valdez *she's mine*, 2014
Fabric, embroidery, and acrylic. 24 x 20 inches.



Amanda Valdez *Lost & Found*, 2013
Embroidery, acrylic, and canvas. 42 x 36 inches.

Greenpoint, Brooklyn. I'm originally from the Northwest and I attribute my sturdy shapes to the influence forms situated in the landscape has on me. That region is very special.

How did your interest in art begin?

One of my favorite things as a child was the joy I found in color. I loved the way colors would change in relationship to one another. There were endless color relationships to explore in my craft supplies, mainly embroidery and beads. My color palette still represents this childish joy and I'm a total junkie still for embroidery.

If you had to explain your work to a stranger, what would you say?

I once had a stranger come ask me at an open studio event at Hunter, with a perplexed look on his face, "Are you thinking vagina?" Without a moments pause, I replied, "I'm not thinking vagina, but the vagina is always thinking."

What is your ideal studio situation/workspace? I'm currently living it for three brief months in Omaha at Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts. I'm in love with this residency. I get all sorts of emotions knowing that this may very well never be my reality as long as I stay in New York, a hot topic these days amongst artists being pushed further and further out of the city and boroughs because of steep studio rates. I have this obscenely big beautiful studio, roughly 2,300 square feet! I created a massive desk compound in the center and my walls and floor are rapidly filling up. It's quiet here: sonically, visually, and socially; that space is ideal to really find my questions and creative impulses that bump me forward. I try and get out of the city once a year for a residency. Keeps me in love with New York.

What are some current projects you are working on? I'm at Bemis working on my upcoming solo at Denny Gallery in New York this fall. I don't want to jump the gun and say what it's about because my ideas are in the early stage of germination. I'm really excited about where the work is leading me right now. One of my favorite projects I'm working on is with the exhibition collective, Same Same but Different, alongside artists Jay Gaskill and Fabian G. Tabibian. To date we've made three exhibitions in three different cities. We use the exhibition space as our point of collaboration and works of art as material. We started as a means to create and control the context for our work and to push away from a New York central attitude. Recently our ideas are completely expanding the potential for the work our group does. Plus there are always donuts involved, so I'm always excited about Same Same.

Can you share one of the best reactions you've gotten as a result of your work? One of the best things I've found is people will tell me things about their body. They are deeply personal and private stories they have been compelled to share with me because something in my work has triggered the memory of their body. They are not your everyday stories either; they range from medical to sexual. I suddenly feel like a priest though, so I shouldn't share their confessions.

What are you really excited about right now? Well being in Nebraska is affording me all kinds of awesome experiences. March 15th was National Quilt Day and I went to Lincoln to the International Quilt Study Center and Museum for their celebration. It was killer in the way that you put all the ladies of Jo-Ann's Fabric together in museum. I couldn't get into a single talk! In all seriousness, I look all over the world at the way cultures hold their history in shapes and textiles. Studying the history of quilting shows the innovation of design, story telling, activism, and skill that woman have been exerting in this field. I was just in Turkey researching Islamic Art and the parallels between the design motifs I found there, and those of the traditional pre-modern designs in quilts rival one another in complexity and execution. I'm also really excited about an upcoming trip to the Badlands in South Dakota at the end of April.

What are you listening to right now? Musically I revert back all the time to my teenage/young adult self. This week has been a lot of late 90's jams: The Cure, a mix I made called Mariah4Life, another mix called sogood that's all The Isley Brothers with some Keith Sweat, Portishead, and my secret guilty pleasure that calms me and reminds me of doing dishes at my moms house—Tracy Chapman. I recently came out and confessed to my musician boyfriend this secret, I really built it up, and he was totally down with it and slightly amused! Then there's CocoRosie!