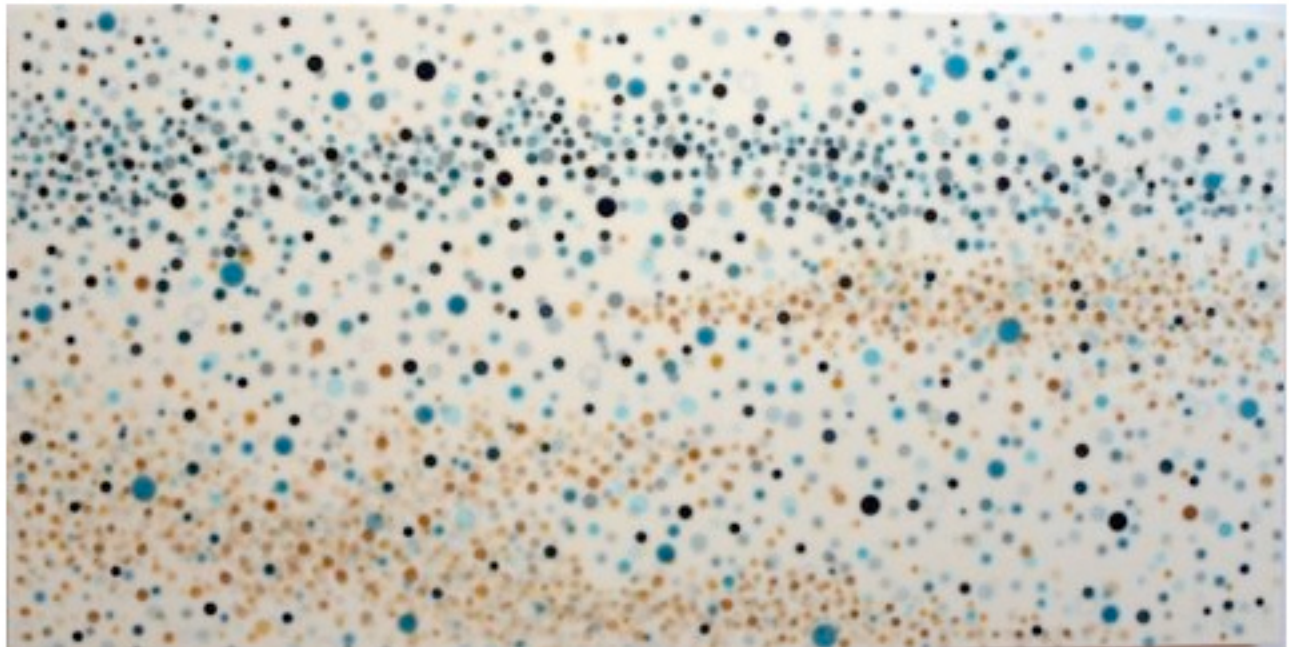


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West of Chelsea: Way West

By NANCY TOBIN



courtesy of Heidi Van Weiren

"Badlands 00301," 2009, glue and ink on panel.

Inspired by the ArtPrize competition she [wrote about recently](#), Nancy Tobin interviewed Heidi Van Weiren, who caught her eye because she was able to break into the New York art market as an outsider.

As I was perusing the myriad artists who will be showing their stuff for September's [ArtPrize](#) event in my hometown of Grand Rapids, Mich., I was delighted to see that [Heidi Van Weiren](#) will be participating. I've followed her mesmerizing work through one of my favorite Chelsea galleries, [Margaret Thatcher Projects](#).

The elements in Ms. Van Weiren's compositions are simple: colored ink circles suspended in Elmer's glue. But the effect is a sophisticated and intriguing world that is at once calm and exciting. Her latest works were inspired by a trip to the Badlands in South Dakota.

Looking through Ms. Van Weiren's profile, I discovered that she, too, is native to western Michigan. I thought it would be interesting to talk with her about her untraditional medium and how a girl from Holland, Mich., went about tackling the Big Apple.

Your work is fascinating and unique. How did your technique develop?

For as long as I can remember, I have always been fascinated with materials. I have also always been crazy about drawing and making beautiful objects.

With these two things in mind, I do not have an art-savvy background. I believe that, simply put, because of this I've always been particularly mindful of trying to connect the naïve viewer. For some time, I've used

mundane materials as a vehicle of connection, to illustrate the beauty of the everyday and then to manipulate them as a vehicle of transcendence. I did installation work that reveled in process, but I started to resent its temporary nature. The installations were constructed with mundane, somewhat domestic materials: wax paper, drinking straws, clear tape, and Elmer's glue and Kool-Aid.

Elmer's Glue and Kool-Aid?

I became particularly interested in Elmer's glue and Kool-Aid, and things kind of unfolded from there. The work has become Elmer's glue and ink as it has grown further away from being simply about the materials.

Western Michigan is gorgeous (especially in the summer). Do you feel firmly rooted to the area?

West Michigan is gorgeous. I'd take it over the Hamptons any day (but don't tell anyone!). I feel totally rooted to the area and still spend a lot of time there over the summer.



Heidi Van Weiren at the Badlands.

My husband and I (and our three kiddos) just relocated from NYC to Iowa City, Iowa. I think in the Midwest we feel rooted. And for me, I think it is the land and space. Not only did I grow up in Holland, but I grew up on about 100 acres with horses (that were rescued from the glue factory); goats; chickens; turkeys; and a big garden.

How long did you live in New York City? Do you think that helped you to connect with your gallery?

I lived in NYC for eight years. Yes, I think it probably helped me connect with my gallery, but who knows for sure?

Was having a Chelsea gallery a focus for you?

Having a gallery in NYC was a focus for me, definitely. Hell, yes! But mostly I just want to make and show my work.

It may be totally cliché, but I love making art and I'm willing to show wherever I can. I believe this mindset has been my building blocks. Margaret [Thatcher] is so great! I love her and the gallery. In my mind, she is what a gallery owner/director should be. She loves art and has the utmost respect for it. She's also brilliantly smart and knows how to sell work.

How do you plan to manage your career so far west of Chelsea?

I plan to work really hard, make a lot of work and hope for the best.

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