

Cells and Stars

Yoga, faux finishes, and astrophysics culminate in a new solo show by artist Kim Manfredi.

by Cara Ober



Courtesy of the C. Grimaldis Gallery

In 1988, a young artist named Kim Manfredi began her career. After graduating with a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art, she set out to find the perfect day job. She wanted to spend the maximum time possible in her studio to continue to develop her art, so she looked for the job that would pay the most money for the least amount of time. This is how many so-called “starving artists” survive. They work in restaurants and bars, don't have health benefits, paint in their off-hours, and scrape by to make a living. Many believe they must live this stereotype and struggle financially in order to be true to their artistic selves. However, this particular young artist didn't settle for the status quo.



Last year, Manfredi earned her masters degree from MICA's Hoffberger School of Painting. In the twenty-one years that had passed, Manfredi founded and ran two successful businesses: the first a million dollar-grossing decorative painting business, the second the thriving local franchise Charm City Yoga, which



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currently employs more than fifty people in four locations. Successful business owner is a title few starving artists can claim; however, Manfredi has used her commercial experiences to fuel her newly energized art career.

When Manfredi started out as a young artist, her own painting took a backseat to her businesses. “My whole practice merged into decorative painting,” Manfredi says of her commercial business. “I was obsessed with learning a craft. I took a hiatus from art with no regrets at all.”

She based her painting business in the historic iron and brick Stanford White carriage house. Over time, Manfredi began using the upper floors to teach the occasional yoga class. As demand increased, she added more classes, hired several other yoga teachers, and got certified to train yoga instructors. Surprisingly, it was the yoga practice that brought her full circle back to her own artistic pursuits. “A lot of MICA MFA students were coming to the yoga studio for classes,” she remembers. “We became friendly, and they encouraged me to apply to the Hoffberger School of Painting.”



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Manfredi started painting canvasses again and in 2005 applied to graduate school. She wasn't accepted. She dug in, though, continued to work on her portfolio, and in 2007 she was accepted. Manfredi's artwork changed radically while at MICA. “After sixteen years of craft, I rigorously worked for two years to unlearn everything I had learned,” she says.

Manfredi began to view making art as a state of consciousness rather than the physical act of creating a product or illustrating an idea. Her work changed from busy and decorative to minimalist and experimental. Manfredi would pour paint, drilling holes in the canvas, and extruding the paint through the surfaces. These works often required months to dry and were informed by her extensive understanding of commercial painting supplies and techniques, with the chemical reactions in the paint creating the final imagery. “For me, creating a visual experience means that the work is going to have to push the technique and the material into unknown territory,” she says. “The result has a certain amount of awkwardness that is not necessarily harmonious, but is an authentic search for something new.”



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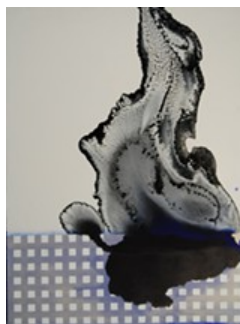
As her work evolved, Manfredi realized that her paintings contained “the ambiguity and consistency of outer space and inner space.” No coincidence: Manfredi's husband, Chris Blades, headed the servicing missions to the Hubble telescope for many years. “Being married to an astrophysicist has given me a certain understanding of the gaseous state of all things and the massive distances between objects; this also mirrors the spaces within the body that yoga attempts to develop,” she says.

In Manfredi's newest solo exhibit at the C. Grimaldis Gallery—*Cells and Stars*—the viewer is reminded that we live in a precarious state of clarity, balanced in between the microscopic and macroscopic worlds. Firmly anchored between swirling universes of cells and stars, human beings have the opportunity to appreciate the simultaneous complexity and simplicity of life.

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At this point in her art career, Manfredi is uniquely poised among recent MFA graduates. Rather than struggling with student loans and financial concerns, she is able to paint in her studio from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day. Grounded physically and spiritually in her yoga practice, Manfredi maintains a healthy balance between work and play. In the past year, she has exhibited in Baltimore, D.C., and New York, and has attended a month-long artist residency at the Vermont Studio Center. Two decades and many life lessons later, Kim Manfredi is living proof that an authentic and successful artist does not need to starve.



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To see additional works by Manfredi in the artist's studio, tickets are available for a September 24 Art to Dine For event, co-sponsored with Costas Grimaldis, as part of the Creative Alliance's fall fund-raising effort. The event features original artwork, Greek food, and live music. For tickets, go to www.creativealliance.org.

KIM MANFREDI – Cells and Stars

New Paintings

September 2 – October 2, 2010

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 2, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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