

MORGAN LEHMAN

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VoyageLA

Art & Life with Kysa Johnson



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Today we'd like to introduce you to Kysa Johnson.

Kysa, please kick things off for us by telling us about yourself and your journey so far.

I was always interested in the how's and why's and what's of things, and in drawing things. When I was in High School in Connecticut, I had this phenomenal AP Chemistry teacher (shout out Mr. Francis!) who sparked in me an immense excitement for the natural world. He got me hooked on science right at the time I was extricating myself from a very dogmatic religion. Here was a world where my questions were welcomed and encouraged instead of shut down and vilified and a new love was born. Somehow, I didn't think to merge my two interests of science

and art until my final year as an Undergrad at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland. I was reading laymen's books on Quantum Physics and I came across images of particle decay patterns (the pathways that unstable particles travel on as they decay into other more stable particles.) They are gorgeous and I was like oh my god, the universe is drawing at this fundamental physical level! I became obsessed with these individual patterns and they formed an alphabet for my work. Everything I've done since then in some way stems from that discovery.

I had to come back to the US in 1998 and worked a slew of part-time jobs in New York. One at the Dumbo Arts Center really got me involved in the art world there. I had my first group show in NY there and through that my first gallery Roebbling Hall. A solo show at the Aldrich Museum got me interested in doing big wall drawings and installations which has remained a big part of my work ever since. I've been lucky enough to do some big wall and full room drawings in places like Dublin and the Canary Islands since then. I started working with Morgan Lehman Gallery in about 2008 and they have been a huge support over the past 10 years. In 2010 my husband and I had our son and 2014 we had our daughter. In 2015 we moved our family to LA for my husband's work. It's been the most amazing thing. I love LA, there's a really reciprocal energy here. The art community is very supportive and open and communal. I've met an amazing group of artists that I find continually inspiring and I was lucky enough to have a show at Von Lintel Gallery in Culver City last summer that I am really proud of. I'm truly thankful we ended up here.

Can you give our readers some background on your art?

I make drawings, paintings and installations that use microscopic imagery to build up larger compositions that relate to them conceptually. So, I might use asexually reproducing bacteria to build up compositions of Immaculate Conception paintings, or in the most recent series, The Long Goodbye, I use subatomic decay patterns to build up images of the life cycle of stars. I'm interested how patterns repeat over scale and across time. Some of the work brings in historical and political references, especially in installations. My solo booth at the Armory Show referenced collapse at a physical (subatomic decay patterns), historical (images of Piranesi's Roman ruins) and contemporary systematic (the Bank of America's Corporate Headquarter's waiting room) level to look at and correlate three iterations of the same process over scale and time.

I have so much awe for the physical universe that we live in. I want to inspire some of that in others. I feel like if we can zoom out and get outside of ourselves, and see how certain processes are common across different scales and through different times, then we can have a perspective that is grounding, humbling and we might have a glimpse of the sublime that is inherent in all things.

Artists rarely, if ever pursue art for the money. Nonetheless, we all have bills and responsibilities and many aspiring artists are discouraged from pursuing art due to financial reasons. Any advice or thoughts you'd like to share with prospective artists?

Well, this is not a job you do because you think you'll make a ton of money. You have to be in it for the love of doing. But of course we all need money to live and it feels like an affirmation when you earn money from what you make and love. Being an artist in LA has been amazing because people really band together and help their fellow artists and the whole community as a whole by being pro-active. There are so many amazing artist run spaces, and people putting together artist swap meets and things like GIFC run by o-o LA. Things outside the traditional gallery system that help artists get exposure and make some money here and there. There is also a new online auction platform exclusively for artists called Unibrow (<https://uni-brow.com/>) that will be launching soon started by the artist Casey Jex Smith. It will allow artists to sell their work directly, and have control over whether the sale information is public or private. I feel like these are a few examples of how the art market is slowly changing to put the power back in the hands of artists. That said, I've had all sorts of jobs, full-time, part-time, freelance since I graduated in 1998. Over the past 20 years I've done every creative thing under the sun to keep my life as an artist going. There should be no shame in that! I've often gained amazing skills through these outside jobs that then filter into my work, or how I am able to organize my time as an artist. My years doing freelance fashion show production in NYC has really enabled me to streamline my production, especially when I'm doing a big site specific installation with a tight deadline. Having alternate lives outside of your life as an artist can actually enrich your life as an artist.

What's the best way for someone to check out your work and provide support?

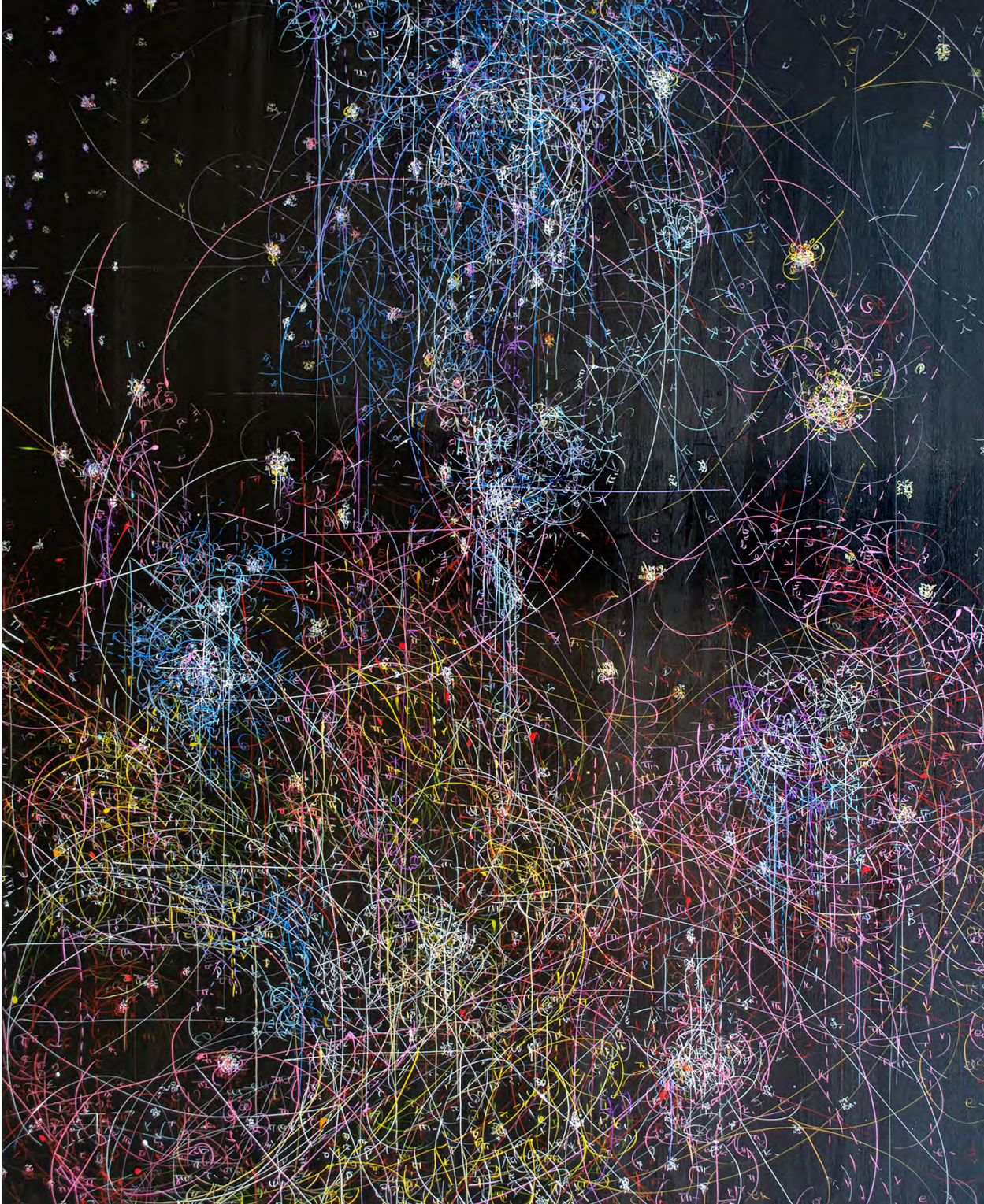
I am in a group show now with the Binder of Women Collective (www.thebinderofwomen.com) at Guerreo Gallery in San Francisco. It's the first time I've ever shown in SF, so I'm quite excited about that. I have a solo installation at the new project space Mesa in Inglewood (www.mesaprojectspace.com) in the late Fall based on the physical history of crude oil and I installed my first outdoor vinyl over the storefront window there, that will be up for the next few months. I'll have a show in New York at Morgan Lehman Gallery in the next year, but date is TBD. If you are in the Boston area you can see work newly acquired by MIT in their new building at 1 Main St. I'm really pleased about this, I have an institution crush on MIT!

Contact Info:

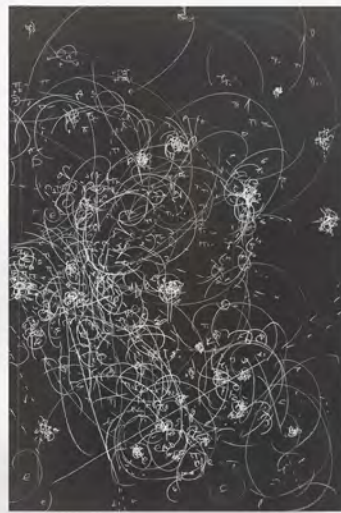
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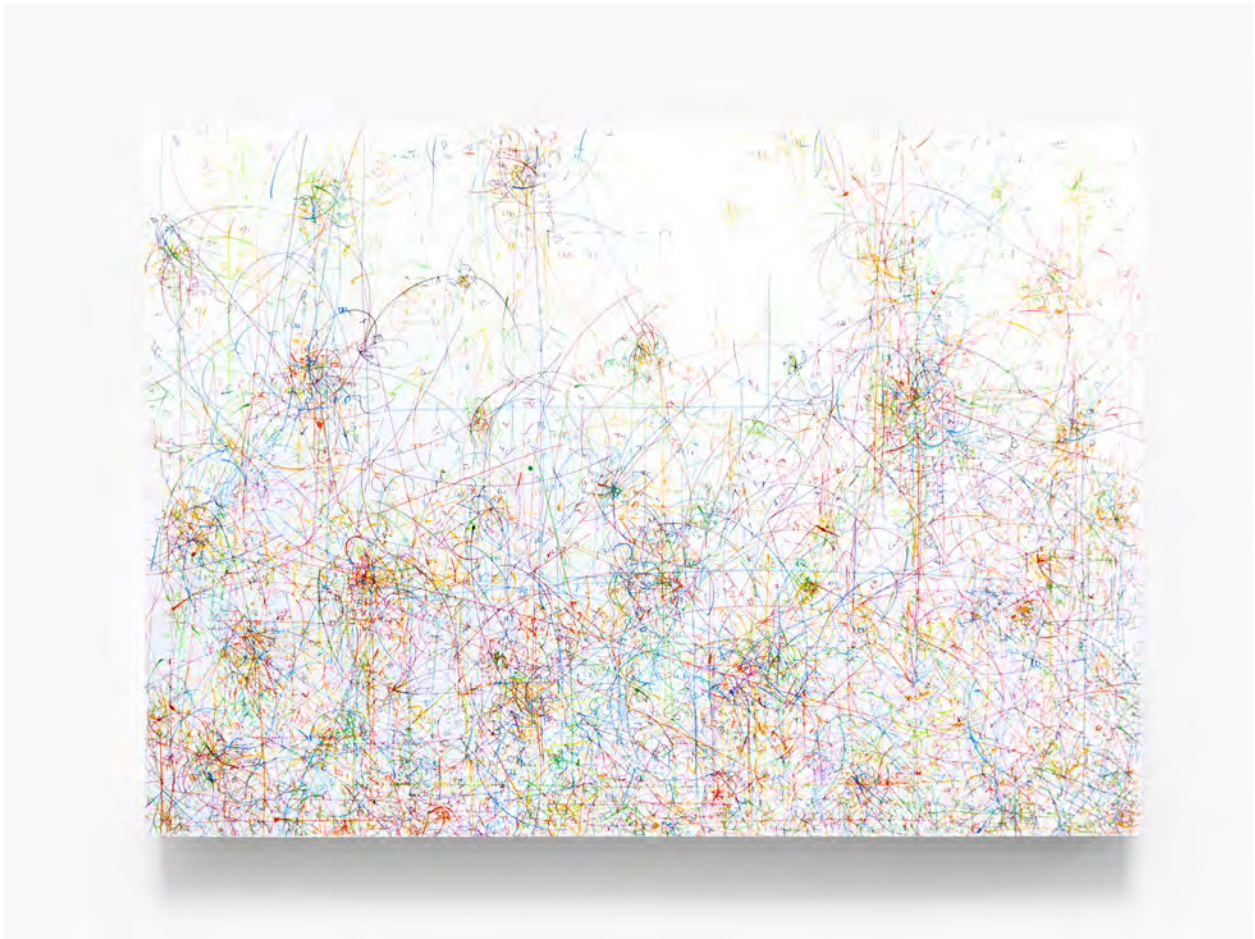


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