

ARTFULLY AIMEE

It's pretty easy to find an artist who can't wait to move to the Big Apple and live out her lifelong dream of becoming the next in-demand artist. It's pretty hard to find an artist who wants to turn her hometown arts scene into a thriving culture where she can be the in-demand artist.

But Aimee Manion—artist by profession, scientist by hobby—is doing just that. Painter, weaver, entrepreneur; it doesn't matter what title you give her, Aimee is part of a new wave of Pittsburgh professionals making a living through their creativity.

Aimee honed her skills as an undergraduate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), where she earned degrees in painting and fibers, a minor in anthropology, and way more credits than she needed.

"I took a lot of science classes and electives just because I liked them," says Aimee. "I ended up with like 180 credits."

Currently, she concentrates on painting and uses her free time to create jewelry and woven bags out of recycled materials.

In October, Aimee was the featured artist at ModernFormations in Garfield. The show,

Created by Accident, displayed Aimee's own work as well as her collaborations with Sebastian van Gorder—aka Talman Charters, Aimee's longtime boyfriend. Aimee and Talman—sci-

entist by profession, artist by hobby—possess a unique style that combines provocative abstract imagery with the tangible, a method by which the two explore the unnoticed details of life. Their work invites viewers to think about their place in the universe and its impact on the world around them.

Although the show is a dual exhibition, most of the work on display belongs to Aimee, who draws much of her inspiration from the natural world and the scientific images used to illustrate the complex inner workings of the human body.

"The processes in the body are such beautiful, ineffable things," says Aimee. "Scientific images don't get at any of that beauty. They're so clinical they actually take it away."

In her paintings, Aimee breathes life into these natural functions with a saturated

palette and whimsical, eccentric style. She works mainly on wood, which allows her to sand down her paintings and easily add new layers of gesso and color as the works develop. By using both watercolors and oils, Aimee gives herself a wide range of possible texture, color, and line combinations with which to create movement and depth in her images.

Aimee utilizes motifs to generate cohesion across her body of work. Images of tube-shaped centrioles can often be found bending and flying across the artist's compositions, as in *Blue Sky Toss*, where Creamsicle-colored centrioles shoot microvilli across a blue sky. Non-scientific motifs, like spirals and networks of lines, create connections and often hint at realism, lending a sense of size and space to each of Aimee's paintings.

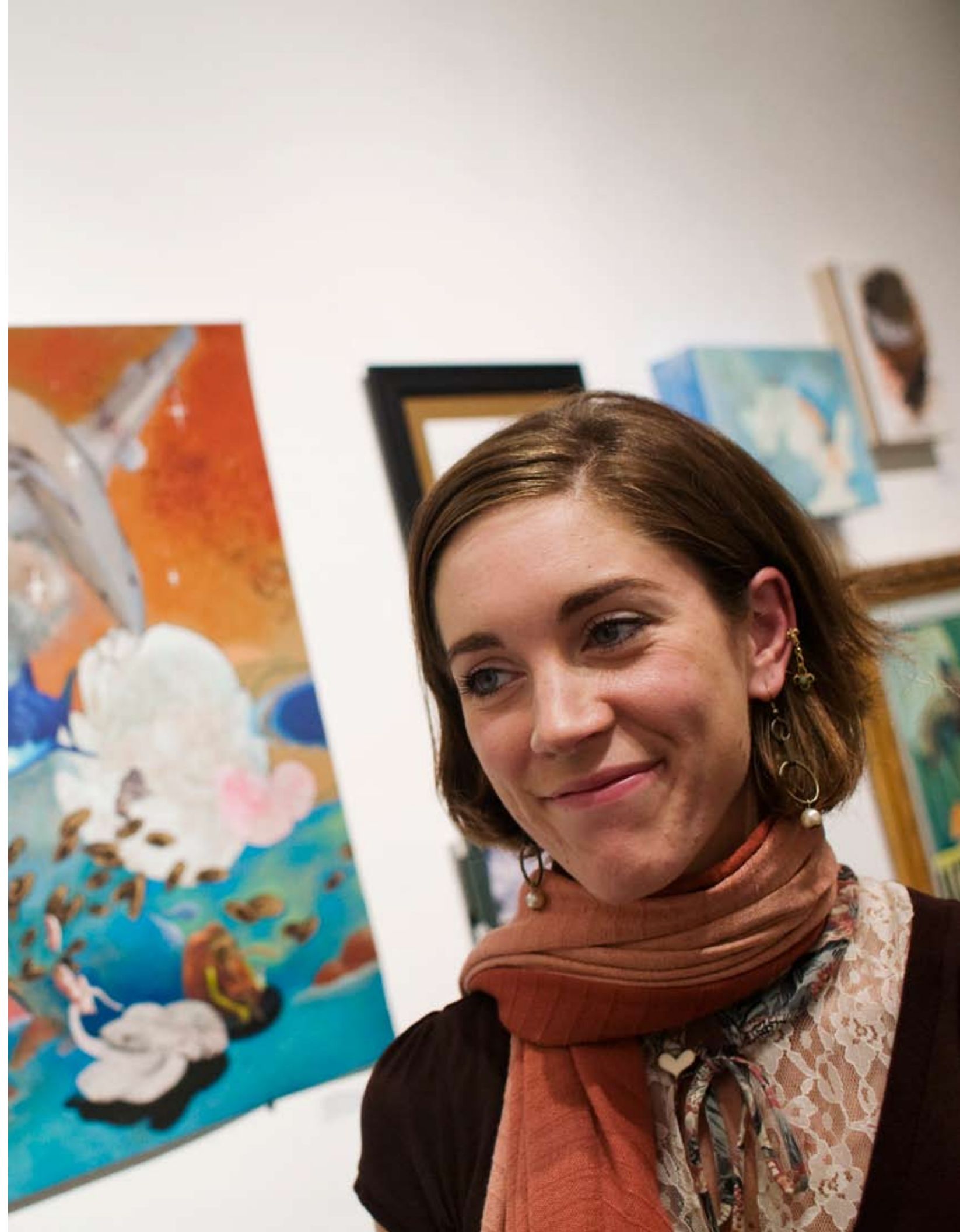
Though she frequently appropriates the scientific, Aimee also draws from the tangible, technical world to comment on our consumer-driven society. In *Internet Blooms Organisms*, she combines

THIS PAGE AND NEXT:

► On the closing night of her show at ModernFormations, Aimee Manion is pleased with her first solo exhibition.

PAGE 43:

►► *Lemon Jelly*; 16" x 20"; oil, ink, vellum, gesso, collage and polycrylic on wood; 2007





the smallest parts of our natural world with an abstract depiction of technology, drawing parallels between the internet and evolution. Alongside a network of deep blue lines representing the internet, Aimee uses intestine-like shapes as a metaphor for consumption and greed.

FOR AIMEE, THE BEST PART ABOUT having a solo show is seeing how people react to such a large collection of her work.

"A woman told Talman and me that we are two of the most creative beings she has ever met," says Aimee with a laugh. "It was great seeing such a positive reaction to our work."

Just down the road from ModernFormations, Aimee's art was also on display at Fe Gallery's *In the Making: 250 Years/250 Artists*. The exhibit was part of Pittsburgh's 250th birthday celebration and featured 250 artists from the region. Two of Aimee's pieces can be found in the show. One image, *Lemon Jelly* [shown right], depicts a centriole flying past two organic shapes resem-

bling piles of raspberry jam. The painting—oil, ink, vellum, gesso, collage and polycrylic on wood—is exemplary of Aimee's unique process and style.

On January 9th, *Yes. Thank you.*, Aimee's newest show, opened at the Brew House Association in the South Side. When we first spoke this past fall, Aimee was working diligently on a series of multi-media paintings for the exhibit, and toying with the idea of creating a sculptural piece from yarn.

"Most of the other people in the show are my old professors [from IUP], so it's an honor to display next to them," beams Aimee. "I'm movin' on up in the world!"

WHILE BEING AN ARTIST MAY SEEM tiring, you won't ever find Aimee glued to the couch. She fills time away from painting with creative projects, like helping with Talman's science club, work-

ing on her website, or creating jewelry and handbags.

"I usually have about ten things going at once," explains Aimee. "But I don't watch TV, so that saves me a lot of time."

For one involved project, Aimee works with her mother, crafting jewelry and knitted bags from recycled materials. Selling their creations at craft fairs and artisan shows, Aimee has turned this family pastime into a lucrative hobby.

I accompanied Aimee to one such event, the Sundae Market—a tour that travels to different cities to promote local art scenes. Under a blue canopy, tables were covered with Aimee's handmade work. She picked up two crocheted chokers—one yellow, the other red—adorned with colored flowers and gems.

"These flowers were part of the same necklace. I took it apart to make two," she explained, gently placing the pair back on their black velvet display rack. "I like to wonder about the pieces I find in their collections. It's fun to be able to give them all new stories."

"The processes in the human body are such beautiful things. Scientific images don't get at any of that. They're so clinical."

While knitting and crocheting may seem old-fashioned, Aimee can take your grandma's old sweater and turn it into a chic make-up bag, decorated with a hand-drawn pentapus. ("I couldn't fit eight legs to make it an octopus, so it's a pentapus.") Instead of spending money on brightly-colored yarn, Aimee unravels old clothing, giving it new life as someone's change purse, eye-glass case, over-the-



shoulder bag, or clutch. For accents, Aimee picks through old wardrobes for fun prints, which she incorporates as linings or decoration.

"My parents used to have these ridiculous '80s-themed parties, so I have piles of crazy fabrics to pick from," she said, pointing out a vintage silk paisley top that she turned into a lining.

Aimee not only knits and crochets in the traditional sense, she uses these mediums in her art, sculpting imagined creatures and organic shapes from yarn. Many of these knitted forms repeat motifs from her paintings, but reinterpret them

three-dimensionally. In her show at ModernFormations, purple and green knitted organs were displayed alongside yellow and orange creatures resembling long-bodied ducks. Aimee calls them "mutated glow-worms."

While her penchant for repurposing materials happens to be part of Aimee's method; it also makes for artwork that is environmentally sustainable. And considering the extent to which she draws inspiration from science and nature, it's no surprise that Aimee has always been environmentally conscious.

Aimee expresses her views abstractly through art, but finds

direct ways to make her voice heard, too. While at IUP, Aimee hosted *Environmental Alert*, a radio show that educated listeners about environmental concerns often ignored by the media.

"From [the show] I learned how much I enjoy being a leader and initiating change," says Aimee. "We managed to save a local forest from being logged."

Aimee misses the community involvement she enjoyed at IUP and hopes to start similar work again, but through a means more closely aligned with her personal vision and interests.

"I've found that I'm better at creating my own niche than

trying to fit into an existing one," explains Aimee.

It's this independent spirit, along with her desire to remain in Pittsburgh and contribute to its art scene, that has helped Aimee find success.

"I think artists come to Pittsburgh because it's easier to be discovered here than in New York, where they would be one in a million," she says. "So many artists run off to New York to end up disappointed. Why should I do that when I can create an arts scene right here in my hometown?" *View more of Aimee's paintings and handmade accessories at www.aimeemanion.com.* ●

Image courtesy of the artist