Michelle Samour

My work deals with the reconfiguration of meaning through organic and constructed investigations. By processing abaca plant fiber into translucent handmade paper, I create a transitory context for my inquiries into the broad issues of taxonomy, and the intersections of science, technology, and the natural world.

The imagery in my work has its roots in scientific illustration and the traditions of Eastern miniature painting. I source my Middle Eastern and French ancestries, in particular the detailed patterns in the decorative objects, oriental rugs, fabrics, and wallpapers that were a part of my childhood. My father's immersion in his work as a polymer chemist and inventor had a subliminal influence on my fascination with science and nature. I remember our kitchen science experiments, visits to his laboratory, and his constant molecular drawing and note taking. Not surprisingly, detail, color, patterning, and invention find themselves in my process, as well as in the finished pieces.

The geometric circle is ubiquitous in my work as a symbol of the 'all-seeing eye', viewed in many cultures as an omnipotent god or being watching over humankind. The circle also refers to the eye of the telescope and microscope, and the physiological eye as our first lens to the visual world. Clusters of cells (biologic, geometric, and

TOP: **Michelle Samour** ***Eye of God*** Detail, gouache on pigmented abaca fiber, 6.5" in diameter, 2011. Photo: Eric Hester.
MIDDLE: **Michelle Samour** ***Wired Eye N.10*** Gouache on pigmented abaca fiber, 24" in diameter, 2010. Photo: Robert Schoen.
LEFT: **Michelle Samour** ***Eye of God*** (Installation view at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft) Gouache on pigmented abaca fiber, 7'x 17', 2011. Photo: Eric Hester.

LEFT: **Michelle Samour *Eye Aggregation N.1*** Pigmented abaca fiber, perspex, wood, 62" x 22" x 22", 2012. Photo: George Bouret.
RIGHT: **Michelle Samour *Reflecting Pool: Beautiful Viruses*** (Installation view at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft) Pigmented abaca fiber, two-layered lightbox, 9" x 42" x 120", 2011. Photo: Eric Hester.

technologic) painted onto the pigmented paper with gouache seem to float on their surfaces, momentarily captured for investigation.

In some instances, I obsessively stack thousands of eyes into curious 3-D structures, or mount them on the wall in an immense eye configuration. In other instances, I draw with the pulp to create independent lace-like organisms, which are suspended between clear acrylic over a light source like a microscopic slide sample. My imagery references everything from lethal viruses and microscopic radiolarian to the movement of data in Internet communications through fiber-optic cables and wireless connections. The organic becomes overlaid and interchangeable with the technological.

The use of color supports the notion of organization and categorization within my work. Isaac Newton's theory of light and colors proved that sunlight could be prismatically separated into seven colors, information he used to create the color circle or 'wheel.' Today, the RGB color model for the display of images on television and computer monitors can create a large array of colors from various additions of only red, green, and blue. Color and light become yet another inquiry into making the invisible visible.

I continue to be fascinated by the sublime, the sense of awe experienced in realizing that the Fibonacci numbers exist in the spirals of a sunflower's seeds and in our own DNA. My curiosity and inquiry is driven by the vastness of the universe and the limits of reason. To quote Emmanuel Kant, "Whereas the beautiful is limited, the sublime is limitless, so that the mind in the presence of the sublime, attempting to imagine what it cannot, has pain in the failure but pleasure in contemplating the immensity of the attempt."

—Michelle Samour resides in Boston, MA, and is on the faculty of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston where she teaches papermaking. www.michellesamour.com