

## Patterns with Purpose

A studio visit with Kim Piotrowski

It took a Terry Winter's retrospective at the Whitney to help Kim Piotrowski put things into perspective. As a struggling pre-med student in college, Kim found herself shadowing the art student crowd on a regular basis. But it wasn't until Winter's exhibition that Kim finally decided it was time to hang up the lab coat and pick up the painter's smock.

"That show changed me," Kim explains in her City Island studio. "I couldn't do organic chemistry anymore. I was horrible at it. I thought, how could I do this for the rest of my life?"



It was around the time of this major change that Kim's father shared a *National Geographic* article on fractal geometry. Visually, she was drawn to the detailed, self-repeating patterns characterizing fractals. Conceptually, the prospect of maintaining some connection to the sciences even as she took the plunge into the fine arts was a reassurance. "I just started painting the fractals. All the while, I was attempting to blend the science and the art together so I wouldn't forget one or the other."

Maintaining this fusion of arts and sciences has led the artist to her most popular series of work, the "altered book paintings." Using scientific texts sourced through the internet, Kim illuminates the pages with gouache abstractions, executed in a range of vibrant colors. "My patterns have gotten a bit more arbitrary lately. They are inspired more by the things I see day-to-day and what I think about the world. Some of them still have a scientific inspiration, but the science is more in the text. My technique is more pattern-based."

When asked what she enjoys about producing these small-scale works, Kim says that she is happy to provide affordable works of art to a larger population via her

Etsy shop. "People like to purchase three or four of these small works at a time, and I like that I can sell them at a lower cost, so that's a possibility."

In addition to her ever-growing series of book paintings, Kim has an extensive collection of large format paintings filling her studio. Many of the bigger canvases have spent time over the past four years decorating Barney's on Madison Avenue. "I like the purity of a gallery space, but I loved seeing my work with other things. The display in-store transformed the canvases into fashion-based props; it became a more utilitarian situation."

Viewing her work next to clothes piqued the painter's interest in seeing her work *as* clothes. "It was incited by my desire to have my imagery become something useful. Something people still get to look at but that also functions as a piece of clothing."

Serendipitously, Kim's friend introduced her to designer [Ann Yee](#)—knowing that the artist wanted to work in clothing while the designer wanted to collaborate for her Fall '12 collection. "We had met in passing before, and Ann knew that she wanted a print inspired by these cave photographs. I took the images she was looking at, made nine different pieces, and then Ann zeroed in on exactly what she wanted and took it to production."

After attending the designer's presentation and seeing her work in so many different forms—as a dress, shorts, and details—Kim was convinced that clothing was a realm she'd like to explore further. "Seeing my work on clothes and in motion rather than this static thing was incredible. My patterns took on another life."

While there is no reason the artist might not one day tackle the dressform herself, for now, she is excited by the prospect of future collaborations with established designers and producing accessories on her own. And if her exquisite print for Ann's fall collection is any indicator, scarves (etc.) based on Kim Piotrowski's original patterns will be wearable art to own and love.

To purchase Kim's work, visit her [Etsy shop](#). Or follow the artist on her [blog](#) and [Facebook page](#).

By [Francesca Sonara](#)