



Soft Serve

Artist Cameron Anne Mason pushes
the limits of fabric in her
colorful, textured sculptures.

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Lately, Cameron Anne Mason's studio is an explosion of color, thanks to rows of drying racks filled with green, blue and turquoise fabrics. "These are ice-dye samples, where I use ice to slow down the color reaction," explains the artist, who often sounds more like a scientist as she describes the practices she's been refining for the last two decades. "I'm in the process of making 90 different swatches, because I need to know what all the colors look like with this technique. I'm a bit obsessive over this stuff, but these are my tools."

While Mason works with common materials, her methods are anything but ordinary. "Primarily, I think of myself as a sculptor, and my sculptures are made from soft materials—there's no wire or hard armatures," says the North Seattle-based artist. "I work exclusively with dyes; I'm not using paint or any traditional printmaking inks."

Seen in her latest body of work exhibited at Foster/White Gallery, Mason pushed the bounds of her mediums, crafting colorful stand-alone pieces that resemble geological formations and precious stones. The crisp, crystalline shapes come to life by backing her dyed fabrics with interface, a stiffening product typically used in quilting. "Often people don't know what my work is," she says with a laugh. "They'll come into the gallery and ask, 'Is it ceramic? Glass? Leather?'" The last thing they suspect is fabric."

For the artist, an element of surprise is always in dialogue with her rigorous, quasi-scientific approach to dyeing, as well as her high level of craft, which she honed over the years through quilt making and working on puppets and floats for Seattle's annual Fremont Solstice Parade. Mason also studied graphic design, which she credits for her highly organized and regimented process. "I conduct a lot of research, so I can predict the results I'm going to get with dyes fairly well, but there's always a factor of chance."

A walk-through of Mason's studio reveals the different parts of the artist's brain, with meticulously organized bins of fabric, binders of dye samples and small sculptural maquettes with detailed numbering systems alongside the area where she tests new techniques. Ultimately, it's the careful combination of rigor, craft and the unexpected that distinguishes Mason's work. "I like setting things up so that I have an idea of what's going to happen, but also I don't," she says. "That's the magic." ■



One of Cameron Anne Mason's artworks, *Townsend*, appears in her Seattle studio (opposite). The artist stitches hand-dyed fabrics together with colorful thread and interface to create her textured sculptures (left and below). Using exacting techniques, she produces a rainbow of textiles as raw material (bottom).

