

FRIDAY, JULY 20, 2012

## Sara Mast: Bozeman, Montana

LYNETTE HAGGARD'S ARTIST INTERVIEW SERIES



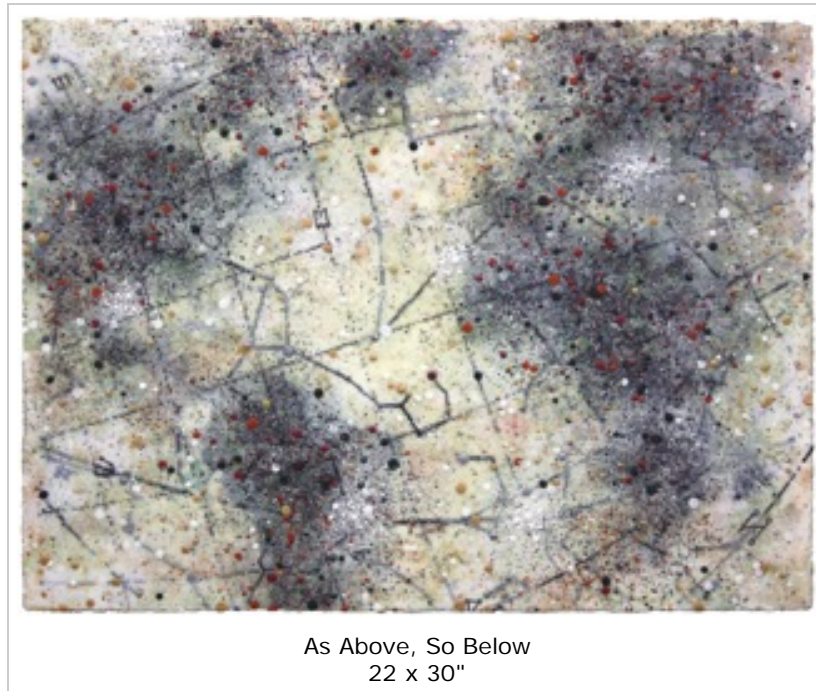
Artist Sara Mast

**Please share a little about yourself. Where did you grow up and what were any early influences on your work? Where do you live now?**

I grew up in Davenport, Iowa on the Mississippi River, which defined my early relationship to nature in the sense that floods were a part of my childhood, as was the movement of riverboats coming in and going out. Learning to spell Mississippi was ingrained by first grade, as was sandbagging and colorful music wafting in the air across the water. I was the only girl in a family of five, so definitely a 'daddy's girl'. When my father proudly held up my drawing of a boat with a row of portholes, each a lens on a different event, and announced I was an artist, my fate was sealed. I was probably four or five at the time.

Growing up in the steamy masses of deciduous trees and rolling hills of the Midwest was comforting, yet conducive to curiosity and induced a sense of restlessness. Now I live in the foothills of the Bridger Mountains in Bozeman, Montana, after spending many

years on the east coast in Boston and New York.



**Did you receive any formal art training?**

I went to a small liberal arts school, Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa. My degree was a Bachelors of Special Studies in Art and Psychology, a degree I was able to design myself. In my junior year abroad, I lived in Italy and studied painting in Florence, which is where I learned how to paint in encaustic.

After undergraduate school, I went to Skowhegan, then returned to Iowa briefly for the MA program at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. In 1979, I moved to NYC after receiving a scholarship to the New York Studio School, where I studied drawing and painting for two years. I completed my art studies at Queens College, where I received my MFA.

**At what point in your life did you become interested in making art and was there a certain point when you decided you were primarily an artist?**

I remember a moment when I was probably three or four years old, and the opportunity to put color on a surface presented itself to me. I was standing in my

parents' bathroom and I saw my mother's rich red lipstick (read: red paint stick) on the counter. I suddenly became aware of the need to slide that red color across the pale turquoise-blue tiles of the bathroom wall, which I did with wild abandon. That is my earliest memory of knowing what brought me joy.

**What is your media?**

I am a painter and work primarily in encaustic, which I have done since 1996, when I participated in the first encaustic workshop offered at R&F Paints.



**What is your current work about?**

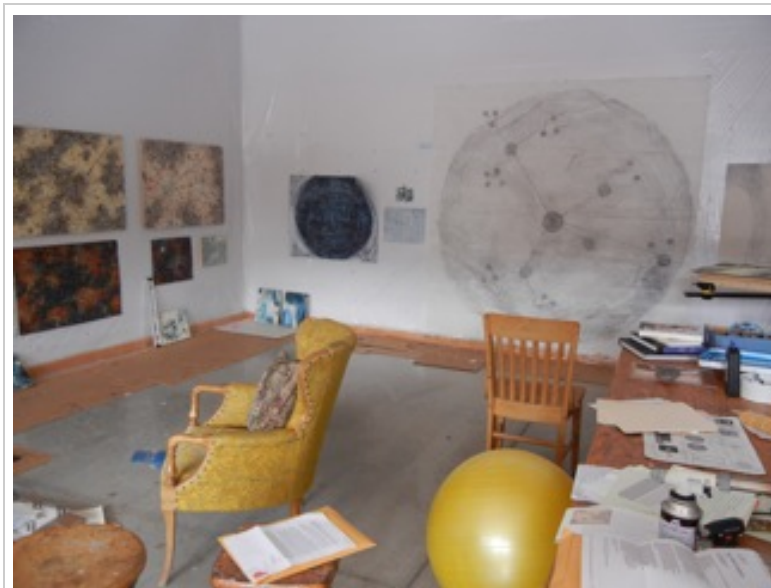
My paintings are cosmological diagrams in which I grapple with new revelations in physics, astronomy, neurobiology, genetics and psychology. I scan the terrain between cosmos and psyche, seeking the tension and interplay between the visible world and the subjective realm.

In 2003, I moved to the mountains from the plains, and the experience of spherical time expressed by the movement of constellations turning in the night sky precipitated a transition in my work from a focus on vast, open fields to a reflection on the bowl of

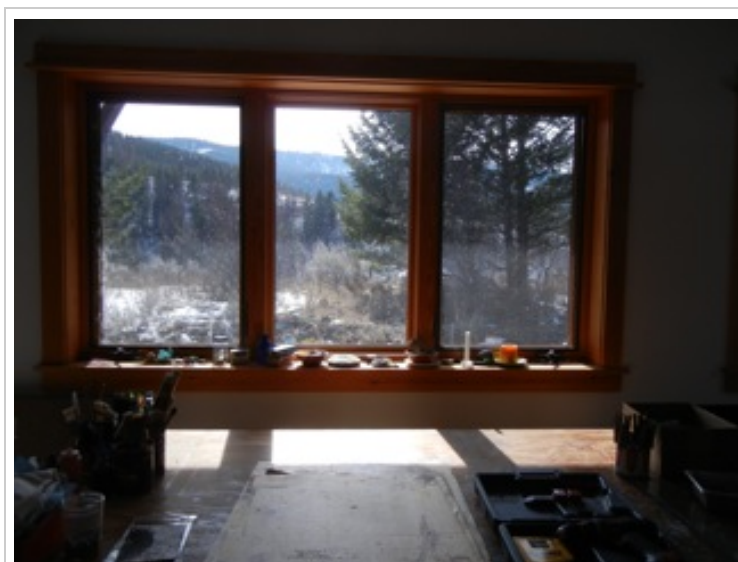
the sky. Presently, I am in another transition, in which I am seeking a visual language to express an internal, energetic state of being or becoming.

**What is your workspace like?**

I have a 30'x 30' studio in my home. My 15' back wall is buried in the ground while the front windows face out onto a mountain view.



Inside Sara's studio



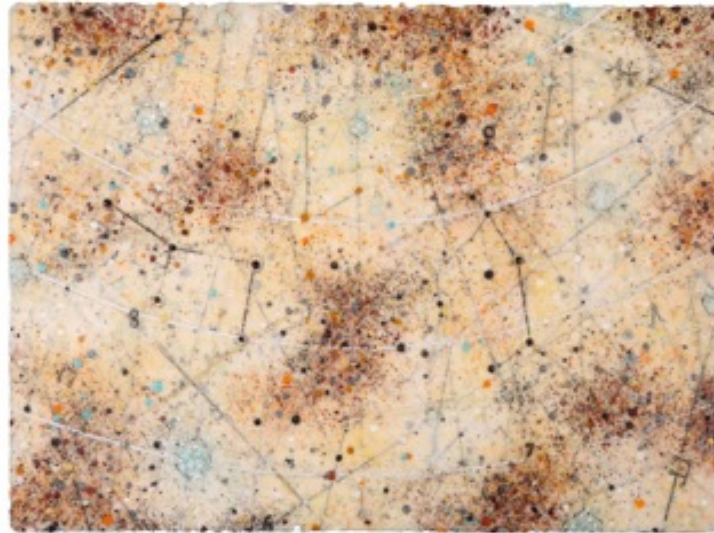
Window view from Sara's studio...

**Are you involved with any arts groups or communities?**

I am an associate professor in the School of Art at Montana State University, so I am very involved in an active community of art and artists.

**What do you gain from that affiliation and what do you contribute to it?**

I am fortunate to work at a Research I institution and thus have many grant opportunities available to support my work. As part of an engaged art community, I contribute time and energy to expanding the program in various ways, such as bringing in visiting artists or developing new curriculum for the Drawing and Painting department, which I co-chair.



Between Stars, 22 x 30

**How do you develop a sense of community with other artists, and how do you support your art colleagues?**

I frequently initiate collaborative projects with other artists as well as scientists. I am very committed to collaboration and cross-disciplinary activities that bridge seemingly disparate fields, approaches and ideas. I often seek to connect with my art colleagues in unique and mutually productive activities that allow each of us to integrate new media, methods and concepts. I find it useful to get outside of myself and my own 'identity' as an artist so that when I return to my personal studio, I arrive with a broader sense of self and an expanded vision of my own studio practice.



Eye of the Storm, 32 x 40

**Do you ever get stuck with your work and how do you remedy this?**

My best remedy for creative block is to accept it gently and to allow myself time to move through it, to the extent that I can, without judging myself. Creative block can often be a 'seed time', an opportunity to go underground and allow new imagery and ideas to bubble up. I often turn to books, internet searches, or to my own writing for inspiration. Often exhibition deadlines don't allow one the time to remain 'stuck', in which case, I rely on what I know from my last body of work to guide me. However, my goal is always to approach my work with a fresh point of view, and to focus on a process of discovery that leads to the new and unexpected. I like to be surprised. For example, I was recently working with some found material that I gleaned from a ditch alongside the road at an artist residency, and through a series of quite unintentional studio activities, I landed upon a line quality that I could not have planned for. I love those fortuitous moments.



The fortuitous discovery...

**Do you have particular habits that you think support your art practice?**

Mornings are for the studio, and on the days I don't teach, I start my day there with a cup of coffee in hand, entering when I am not quite awake yet. I find this ritual is very helpful to my studio practice because I can observe my work in that liminal state between sleeping and waking, which allows me to see without the critical eye that seems to emerge later in the light of day. I typically meditate for anywhere from 15 -30 minutes, which helps me to start the day with a centered, open mind.

**Do you have other jobs other than making art?**

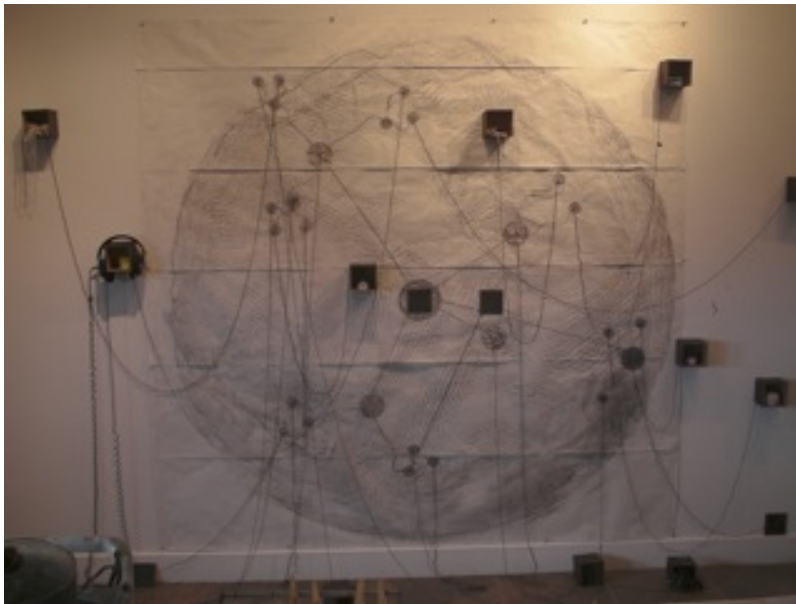
I teach full-time at the university, but summers are often looser and if I am able to receive a summer salary grant, I can take time off from teaching to focus on my studio and ongoing collaborative projects. Currently, I am on a year-long sabbatical, another creative research opportunity I can apply for every 7 years or so as a tenured professor.

**Where would you like to be in 5 years as far as your art making?**

This next year promises to be a productive work time for me, since I will not be teaching. I hope to explore a range of new strategies for presenting my work so that I am less reliant on labor-intensive carpentry for mounting and shipping. My current projects involve a much broader range of artmaking than painting alone, so I am looking forward to expanding my studio practice both materially and conceptually.

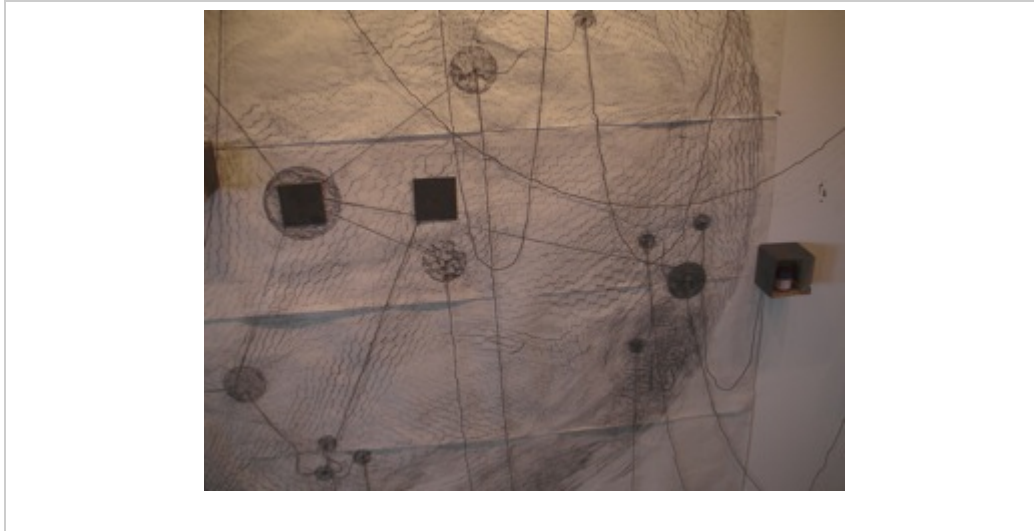
**Do you have any upcoming shows that you'd like to mention?**

I am currently involved in two cross-disciplinary collaborations, both with artists and scientists, one supported by a yearlong sabbatical and the other supported by a NASA grant. I will have 4-5 large scale drawing/painting/prints in some combination for the sabbatical show (Feb, 2013) integrated with video, music/sound, a performance element and biofeedback technology. That show, entitled "*Progeny: Mapping Love*", will begin at the [Ucross Foundation](#) and future venues are pending.



*Prototype of "The Family Tree" for the "Progeny: Mapping Love" exhibition, Collaboration with Eric Mast, 2012 (Ucross Foundation Gallery, Feb-June, 2013) (Detail below)*





For the The NASA grant project, entitled "*Celebrating Einstein*", I am directing the development of a large installation that includes an immersion experience of a black hole (I like to think of it as a 3D painting). Both projects represent unknown territory for me, but what better time for full-blown experimentation than on sabbatical?