

DC

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ARTS & POWER ISSUE

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Best in Show

Performance artist Kathryn Cornelius is about to make quite a scene! | By Tiffany Jow | Photography by Patrick King |

Whether she's in a panda suit at Curator's Office or leading a flock down 14th Street, looking for galleries to clean, DC's most daring creative darling commands crowds. Having held posts at the Smithsonian, G Fine Art, Irvine Contemporary and on the Phillips Collection Contemporaries board, Kathryn Cornelius is leading the newest generation of agenda-setters in Washington's burgeoning arts community.

It was in Binghamton, New York, where the funky chic 30-year-old's left and right brains were cultivated. Between studying photography, drawing and Polish dance, she helped her engineer dad with construction projects and joined her art-teacher mom on Manhattan museum tours, where Rauschenberg and Duchamp rang in as favorites. Propelled by a curiosity for chromosomes, Cornelius entered Ithaca College as a biology major with a concentration in genetics. "I was running DNA tests at midnight on a Friday, and realized I had to get out of there," she recalls. "I couldn't spend my life without a better grasp of people."

And so the quick-change artist took art history courses at the Tate while studying abroad in London. It was there that she had her first formal training in modern art. "I came back and did my debut installation piece for a class project," she says. "I've been turned on ever since."

This month, Cornelius will display her own photographs in "Mixology II: Photo-Based Work" at Curator's Office near Logan Circle, where she's doubling as an exhibitor and mixologist (thanks to bartending skills she picked up during a stint at the Ritz). Soon after this event, she'll project a video onto the 1515 building, which houses Curator's Office, for a project supported by a grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

"I feel like I'm a walking dichotomy, but that's why performance art makes sense for me," she says. "It appeals to my multidisciplinary side." Perhaps it's her box-of-chocolates appeal that makes conceptually minded Cornelius a rising power player. Her goal is simple: "I don't complete the thought," she says. "I just put it out there." ■

KATHRYN'S HOTS

Radio Lab, Bikram yoga, thunderstorms, the scent of old books, ctheory.net, bib overalls, nu disco, Roland Barthes, running in foreign cities

KATHRYN'S NOTS

art as a lifestyle accessory, spreadsheets, gender roles, sidewalk rage, bad public art, sound-bite criticism



NATURAL WONDER:
Performance artist Kathryn
Cornelius gets her glow on.