



EVAH FAN'S POCKET-SIZED PAINTINGS ARE UNINTENTIONALLY PUZZLING AND CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED BY THE FOLLOWING NONSENSICAL *MAD LIB* I ASKED HER TO COMPLETE:

As a wishy-washy artist, Evah Fan is suddenly sandpaper. When you look at her sun block, think about coincidences and saving. The tetherball behind her hash browns isn't quiet; it is simply sleepy and shouldn't be viewed as a pinhole camera. If you discover tissues in her radio stations or feel northern, you will realize that her masking tape is odorless, and that she is quite 9-ish and has a fidgety tic-tac-toe.

Evah is currently attending graduate school in Sweden. —*Kristin Farr*

Kristin Farr: *Mad Libs* really do seem to complement your art. Tell me about why you love them.

Evah Fan: It's sort of nostalgic in a way. I used to play it in fourth grade, and it's something I still enjoy as an adult. I love playing *Mad Libs* because the stories thereafter are unpredictable. I like that they often don't make sense—but sometimes they do! I also enjoy how one person prompts another for a word, and thus, making it fun for each other. Everything seems lighter that way.

What do you like about Sweden?

I like being tucked away in the north, the romance and the neighborhoods. And there's lots of water. I don't really know how to swim, but I see the lake and it's so clear. It makes me want to dive in.

What are some interesting Swedishisms that you've come across?

They have a lot of funny sounding words. For example, *bing-bong* translates to ding-dong. That made me laugh. When they greet people they say, "*tjena*" or "*tja!*" Or from far away they say, "*hej*" pronounced like our "hey," and often in doubles.

The wordplay in your titles is always funny and endearing. What made you interested in language?

I really enjoyed Roald Dahl's children books. He would make up words like "snozzcumber." I like the sound of words scrambling together. And a lot of the images in my paintings may





seem very awkward, so I think maybe the title can help explain a little bit.

You made a series called *Freeze* recently.

Yes, I painted three more this week. The characters in the paintings are doing the freeze pose like somebody has a gun on them, but there isn't it. You don't see what's threatening.

I noticed one of the characters looks like they're wearing a blanket.

It's Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She's in a ham suit, so even if she wanted to freeze she can't because of that costume. She's doing the pose but she's stuck in that suit.

Your art is very detailed and tidy. Are you the same way in other parts of your life?

I do clean a lot, but that's only because sometimes I stress myself out, so cleaning helps release some of that. Working on art makes me feel in control so I can channel my energies there.

Is that why your work is so small, to maintain more control?

It didn't used to be so small. Over the years they became smaller, but now I think I should try to do bigger ones, a different motion or movement. Sometimes I feel like, ooh, I got that one little hair! and probably I'm the only who would notice it, but I do get a little satisfaction from that.

What are some of your early art memories?

I watched a lot of TV. I'd watch cartoons and draw while they were on. That was my multi-tasking. Whatever I couldn't have I would just draw it; then it would be mine. Almost like a wish list or something.

What kind of stuff?

Sometimes I'd just see things and want to fit them in a picture somewhere. I keep a huge memory bank for some of these objects and try to think of future roles for them. Collecting junk is something I've always done.

Is there any particular junk you're especially attracted to?

Stationery!

What kind?

I find some at rummage sales, stuff I don't really see at the stores that used to belong to somebody else.

Do you have other collections?

Socks. But my biggest one is stationery—note cards, old letterhead, postcards, pens, and pencils.

That reminds me of your *Invitation to a Kleptomaniac* series of groups of objects you might find in various meetings. Where did that idea come from?

My sketchbook. I always write down random things, just mundane living situations. One time I was going back through my sketchbook, and I had drawn little figures with pens and writing

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paper, and I thought a meeting of the objects would be cool. It was around the time I was applying to schools and I was thinking of the admissions committees and different imagined scenarios of meetings.

What do you like about socks?

I'm unsure. It's almost like you're wearing shoes, but you aren't. They could even go all the way up to your waist. And they're so comfy. With socks, you don't really get to see them. Only you would know if you're wearing colorful or funny ones; you have shoes and pants covering them. I do have a sock fetish. They're always missing too, so you have to get more socks to replace them. Pippi Longstocking always had two different socks; I thought that was really cool.

I'm sure people often ask about the stories behind your art, which is understandable. But I also think you should be allowed to be unspecific. It seems like your images are more stream-of-consciousness.

I read somewhere that when people ask to explain your work, and you say a bunch of things, it varies from person to person. And then one person will say, "But I thought it was like this." In the end, who cares? If the image gets a response or a connection in some way, I guess it's good. Also, sometimes people don't



care. Like if you were at a music show and the singer starts saying, “Okay, the next song is all about this girl and—blah, blah, blah....” Then everyone’s like, “who cares? Just play the song!” That’s maybe how I look at it, too.

I used to think we could just paint what we paint, and whatever people perceive, that’s their thing. But if you’re in school where people are giving you critiques, or trying to help you make your work better, then you need an idea behind it. Otherwise it’s just nice, decorative stuff you’re making. Then I feel very empty like I’m just decorating, and I don’t want it to be like that. But it isn’t pretentious in a way where I’m trying to add these really deep things. It’s just choppy little snippets from my head.

What kind of art do you like?

Works that have shown no hesitation; they’re fun and free. I like Masaki Kawai’s and Peter McDonald’s work. Also folk artists like Earl Cunningham—his work feels so immediate and fun and not too planned out.

What’s something that happens when you’re painting that frustrates you?

If I get it dirty. I transfer the drawings that I like and then paint them. I tape random pieces of paper all around the image to protect it. It’s already small, but it’s still all taped up. I don’t trust my arm not to get it all smudgy. I should wear a space suit to paint.

Where do you get ideas for your characters’ clothing? Sometimes they look historical.

It depends. I did some commercial work where I had to illustrate an article about the London Towers with those guards, the Beefeaters. Something like that I’d have to look up but, in my own stuff, I sketch a lot while watching movies. If I see something I like that would be fun to draw, I just keep it in the sketchbook so one day I can use it.

Are there any periods of history you’re particularly interested in?

I like Egyptian stuff, and I’m always curious about the ’20s, ’40s, and ’60s, and Victorian times, digging up the past to history before my

time. I’m curious about what’s behind us, so that’s why I always look back to see.

What are some characters from cartoons or books that you’re nostalgic for?

Arale Norimaki from the *Dr Slump* anime and manga series by Akira Toriyama. Her name is a pun in Japanese of a small rice cracker. Dr Slump is an inventor from Penguin Village, and he wanted to build himself a perfect lady friend, something like in *Weird Science* but gone wrong. She came out short in every way, so instead Dr Slump gained a little sister. Arale plays with poop, fly-walks, and goes time traveling with Dr Slump. I like her because she’s super carefree.

Also, Doraemon. He’s a blue and white robotic cat, and he has all these crazy gadgets in his pockets, like a door that could go anywhere. Other characters like Huck Finn, somebody who’s barefooted and a vagabond. I like Matilda from Roald Dahl’s book, Calvin and Hobbes, Snoopy and the Peanuts gang, Ren and Stimpy.

Favorite movies?

Harold and Maude, *Laundry*, *Wayne’s World*, *400 Blows*, *The Outsiders*, *Reality Bites*, *East of Eden*, *Being There*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and some others I’m forgetting.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Taiwan, and when I was in elementary school my brother and I moved to the States with my dad. Most of my time was spent in Southern California, until I moved to New York to go to Pratt. After undergrad I went back to California, but I didn’t like being around LA, so very hot and trafficky. I’m scared of driving, so that was a big handicap for me. I really liked the Bay Area because you could get by without a car. It was like the midpoint between NYC and LA for me. NY’s is very hectic, and LA’s very chill, so the Bay Area was good, and not too hot.

Your husband, Brendan Monroe, is an artist, too. How do you influence each other’s work?

When we first met, before he was going very

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to be like “come and solve my puzzle,” I just put it out there. Mysteries are probably an inspiration.

Honestly, a lot of it's just pulling from notes in my sketchbook. It's self-amusing and fun for me. But maybe there isn't that much intention. I'd like there to be more, but it doesn't really come naturally.

Do you just need to get the images in your head out on paper? Like you can't help it, you just make what you make?

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense to me. Self-taught artists or folk artists, they just do it, but they don't necessarily know what they're painting, or what it means to speak about it. It's just something very natural. I like things that pick your brain, like more content-filled conceptual pieces. When I try to do that it comes out feeling like I was trying too hard, too contrived.

I think of your work as conceptual. Do you think it could be?

Really? I hope so. When I'm finished it lies out in the open, and people perceive different things. I've had people say it's surrealism, but I wasn't trying for that.

So you aren't into surrealism?

Life is so surreal already.

Do you feel like your stuff is more concrete?

If life is already surreal for me, then I guess I'm depicting life as I see it. I don't know what it is. Dada?

I read that your favorite artists are Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miró, and David Shrigley.

Even though your work doesn't look exactly like theirs, I can see the influence. You change our perceptions of objects like Duchamp, and the little ribbon shapes you paint remind me of Miró, and then the humor and simplicity makes me think of Shrigley. What do you like about those guys?

They're my idols. I like David Shrigley's work because he's funny; he makes you laugh out loud so hard. If you go to a gallery to see David Shrigley's show, it's seriously joyous. He's so smart and witty. With Duchamp, he avoided attention. He was kind of mysterious in that sense, but then he was really brave to throw something like a urinal in a show. With Miró, I like the aesthetics of his work. It seems very fluid, like Calder's mobiles. But then when you read about him, it's so funny that he starved himself until he was all dizzy and seeing walnuts or something before he painted.

Seeing walnuts?! That makes me want to do another *Mad Lib*. Give me a noun.

Trunk.

A name.

Abigail.

Verb.

Scratch.

Noun.

Bottle cap.

Once upon a time there was a trunk named Abigail who wanted to scratch on a bottle cap.

That's inspiration for my paintings.





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Is there any music that you feel could best match your paintings?

It's more like I would want to match them. I like how Deerhoof is melodic and experimental. I like Cat Stevens' songs from *Harold and Maude*, and a ton of film scores and soundtracks.

What inspired your *Notes to Swing* painting?

The composition went up to the top because I got inspired by *The Sound of Music*, so I made the figures go up like the notes, Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do.

You've called the humor in your work naïve. How come?

My laughing point is very low. Maybe other people don't think the same things are funny. Like bing-bong and ding-dong. I laugh at that and other random things. It's really elementary humor.

The word "naïve" bugs me for some reason.

It's Evian backwards. Yeah, it's odd.

What are the objects you find most difficult to draw?

Shiny, blinger ones. Water is hard to paint. Metal objects.

Favorite things to draw?

I like to draw handkerchiefs, scarves, more free-form things. Snow, splashes, drips.

What makes you the happiest?

I'm satisfied with just one delicious meal.

Your name is Evah, like "forevah!"

I must admit the H isn't legally part of my name. I added the H like "Evahhhh."

Why is your website address PotatoHaveToes.com?

It's kind of embarrassing. When I went to Pratt I ate a lot of fries. I've always been fond of potatoes because of fries. Plus I have bad grammar.

So do you think French fries look like potato toes?

No, but if potatoes had toes they could travel, be animated, have some purpose and body parts. They could move or something. It doesn't really make sense. It's just a phrase I

thought of with a nice ring to it.

The title of your website is Two Minute Minuet. Is there a story behind that?

Last year it was One Minute Minuet, so this year I thought I'd just add one more minute. It's like a super-slow dance.

What are you working on right now?

I'm working on a solo show, *Come What May*, side-by-side with Brendan's *Figments* at Galerie LJ in Paris, coming up in September. For this show I'm painting on panels, very curious how they will turn out.

Do you plan to dress up for Halloween?

I might dress up as one of my classmates. That's what we did last year—we dressed up as each other. If not, Buster Keaton would be good.

For more information about Evah Fan, contact Potatohavetoes.com, Richardhellergallery.com, and Galerielj.com.

