

Majesty challenged



Riva Sweetrocket with her work "San Andreas."

By CARA HOPKINS
For the Colorado Daily

Riva Sweetrocket is not an architect, but the magnitude of her creations may make you feel as if you are walking through a grand foyer. Her works are two-dimensional but they have the depth and burning color of a sunrise in the Canyonlands.

Using chalk pastels, Sweetrocket manifests in image the grating nature of limitation against unlimited tenderness. Her pastels are a reminder of what it means to be human—the bittersweet tension of challenge mixed with blessing, the feeling that there is something more while trudging through the necessary daily chores of living.

Sweetrocket is a graphic designer by trade, but she has been an artist all her life, experimenting with various forms of media. Chalk pastels are her tool of choice for her most recent works.

She has exhibited at Core New Artspace and the Flux Galleries in Denver, but the pieces she is currently displaying at NCAR's Gallery II make up her first solo show.

"For this show I really thought about the space," Sweetrocket says, "I wanted the general flow of the works to be a reflection of where I am at currently. All of the works are very recent."

Sweetrocket's subject matter is steeped in contradiction. She presents pieces like "San Andreas," a work that is both beautifully vibrant and rich with foreboding. Its sensual curves are cut by sharp lines of barbed wire—it's stunning fiery tones blending into dark shadows.

The contrasts and the inevitable paradoxes that are found in nature provide Sweetrocket with unlimited inspiration.

"My pieces are about majesty challenged," she says, "about absolute

beauty compromised, about the infinite versus the limited. But the message is not one of defeat and despair, it's one of affirmation."

The works are large—ranging from 12 inches by 12 inches to 54 inches by 64 inches. Sweetrocket finds working on a large scale to be invigorating.

"It's similar to walking into certain architecture," she says, "you feel that somehow it's more than the everyday, it re-connects you with that spiritual feeling...the feeling that we really are more."

The challenge is balancing the incredible power that is possible with the limitations we face as human beings going through a sometimes mundane existence.

"We are spiritual beings," Sweetrocket says, "but we still have to go to the grocery store."

Sweetrocket hopes that those who

view her show will be inspired and uplifted, and that they will see something familiar in her pieces because the struggle that she presents is universal.

"I see myself in almost every work. No matter what I am drawing," she says, "...the work often has a beautiful, fantastic or spirited element persevering in spite of some dark, painful or limiting force."

Riva Sweetrocket's show titled "New Works in Pastel" will be displayed through August 31 at the National Center for Atmospheric Research Gallery II, located at 1850 Table Mesa Drive. Gallery hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sunday and holidays. For more information call 303-497-1000.