



Riva Sweetrocket is a painter.

In this, probably one of the most remarkable facets of Riva Sweetrocket's work is that she uses dry pastels. Her sense of detail and precision is something that graphic artists struggle to achieve on a computer; oil painters, with the finest of brushes. Pastels are typically a loose medium. They do not usually achieve the level of meticulousness that Sweetrocket has managed to accomplish in her paintings.

And yes, they are paintings. According to Sweetrocket, the accepted notion of what a "painting" is finds its provenance in how a surface is covered: If the surface is completely covered with a medium (pastels), then it is a "painting". If the surface is not covered, it is not considered a painting. Therefore, whether one uses pastels or oils, or acrylics or even graphite is not where the demarcation is made.

Technicalities aside, Sweetrocket's work is astounding. It's bigger than the surfaces that she covers. Her colors are bold and, at times, alarming. Typically she begins by creating collages on her computer, a medium she has long been comfortable with since working as a graphic designer. Once the composition is complete, she transfers that onto paper and begins creating her collages with pastels.

I was once encouraged by a professor: to collect things. He believed, as I do now, that collecting things (stamps, coins, music, clothes) keeps you engaged with the world. It keeps you searching, with your eyes open; conscious. Aware.

In large part, this is exactly what Sweetrocket does: She collects images. Then she arranges compositions from them. Her inspiration comes from the world around: from colors, shapes, objects, fashion, images. From objects we recognize and those we may have forgotten about, until now.

There is a device in linguistics called: a hyponymic hierarchy. This hierarchy is more of a concept which moves words, from the specific to the general. It works like this: You take an item, like Gorgonzola cheese. Moving from the specific to the general concept, you back-up: from Gorgonzola, to cheese, to food, to material and so on. The interesting thing is that, with whatever item you begin with – if you extend that hierarchy back as far as it will go, all words can be induced nor further than one of three words: Being, essence, existence.

At this point, Sweetrocket doesn't seem overly concerned with creating grand, specific meanings in her paintings. She's not creating explicitly creating hyponymic hierarchies. But in some ways, she is. Because, certainly, as an artist she is interested in creating something that will add to our humanity. In their most fundamental, her paintings are about: Being, essence, existence.

If not that then, Sweetrocket's work is a lesson in the epitome of what makes art so brilliant in so many ways: it is about the execution of an idea. It's about injection your self into something; making it yours. it is about the permission to express yourself as you see fit. It is about finding inspiration in the smallest of things around you

and then creating a composition in any way you see fit; in any way that makes sense to you.

The brilliance in the definition of what a painting is, is in the idea that Sweetrocket's hands have touched every part of that surface, multiple times.

In her previous bodies of work, you will notice one recurring them: the human form. And one of the most expressive of human forms: the hands. Certainly, the value in using these familiar parts of anatomy is high: most artists cringe at the thought of even trying to replicating human hands. Or fabric. But Sweetrocket has not shied away from this challenge at all. In fact, her work on the whole represents a myriad of challenges. And, triumphs.

Nine years ago Riva Sweetrocket was a working Graphic Designer. But having drawn since she was a child and refusing to extinguish the flame, in 2000, she gently made the move from full time freelancer to a working artist. Now, she is being represented by the best and most provocative gallery in Denver: Plus Gallery. Her husband has worked throughout this transition, and while he has greatly helped make this move – Sweetrocket's path is bold:

Pastel precision. Living as a working painter. Taking common objects and coupling them with others, with color and in a composition. In this way, Riva Sweetrocket is creating meaning out of everything all around us.

Stay tuned with Sweetrocket's forthcoming work and notification of her next show, in September 2009 at the Buell Theater: www.sweetrocket.com.

