

# ARTIST TO WATCH

the editors' choice for up-and-coming talent



## Riva Sweetrocket

### Fresh & delicious pastels

Big. Bold. Bodacious. Coming upon a painting by Riva Sweetrocket for the first time, those are the words that spring immediately to mind. The colors are often so vivid it's hard to believe they are pastels. No subtle gradations or moody hues here. And Sweetrocket's images are as fresh and original as her colors. Quirky juxtapositions bring together hands, feet, fried eggs and flapjacks to create striking compositions.

In a solo show of 12 new paintings opening this month at the Buell Theater in downtown Denver, Sweetrocket employs her signature eye-popping imagery to speak to the majesty of nature and human existence. One common element running through these and other recent paintings is the portrayal of hands, legs, and feet. For Sweetrocket, the isolated body parts possess a visual simplicity that works well in designing compositions. "They also suggest a human element without specifying identity," she explains. "This anonymity allows viewers to make each piece their own."

A former graphic designer, the Colorado-based Sweetrocket says she stumbled upon a box of pastels at a yard sale and fell in love with the colors and the immediacy of the medium. The soft pastels—powdered pigment held together with a binder—have the feel of chalk. When Sweetrocket is creating a piece, her hands are likely to touch one of her chalky pas-

tel pieces thousands of times because she does so much blending. The end product of this "hands on" approach reflects the energy and attention of the artist in ways that photographs and even some brush-painted work may not, she explains: "I can't say exactly what this magical something is, but I feel it there, encapsulated in the piece forever."

The artist's visual banquets are usually packed with metaphors and meanings. For example, *IF THE REAL YOU IS TOO MUCH* is a meditation on how much people reveal or share of themselves with others, Sweetrocket explains. "How much are we really comfortable expressing our true self in all our glory, and how much do we hide?" she asks in this piece.

The painting's vibrant red boots are also visual touchstones that have popped up before in her works. In the past, she has used the boots as powerful symbols to contrast with the dainty red slippers made famous in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. Indeed, Sweetrocket is fond of turning Dorothy's shoes on their allegorical heels, offering viewers a fresh take on the sparkly pumps. "Women have come a long way since *The Wizard of Oz*," she says. "Boots are a stronger symbol than little glass slippers."

The Denver pastelist spends a lot of time thinking about the interconnectedness of things, she says. And she takes a lot of photographs of objects that interest her. She scans them into her computer and then layers images and colors to create compositions. "I shuffle pieces around until the painting builds itself in an intuitive way," she says. She also relishes bringing disparate elements together to create an unexpected order. "It's analogous to putting several items in a blender—if the ingredients are well chosen, what comes out is a surprisingly tasty smoothie!" —**BONNIE GANGELHOFF**



▲ *IF THE REAL YOU IS TOO MUCH*, PASTEL, 60 x 46

▲ *AS ABOVE SO BELOW*, PASTEL, 47 x 68

### DOSSIER

#### REPRESENTATION

Plus Gallery, Denver, CO;  
[www.plusgallery.com](http://www.plusgallery.com)  
[www.rivasweetrocket.com](http://www.rivasweetrocket.com)

#### UPCOMING SHOW

Heaven and Earth, Buell Theater, Denver,  
CO, September 21-January 1, 2010.