

# STASHED

## MIAMI ARTIST EVO LOVE

### PUTS ALL HER LOVE, ART AND HOPE INTO NEW DESIGN DISTRICT GALLERY

BY ANDREA MARIE THOMPSON

**S**mall and compact with an exterior that blares a full building size painting of her and her boyfriend's likenesses, Evo Love's gallery-salon Stash in Miami's Design District holds up its middle-finger to tradition and sameness before one even enters its doors. Hidden behind a larger building with the curlicues, iron lattice work and traditional antebellum columns one still sees on buildings in New Orleans, Stash is part of a complex of buildings owned by a Miami businessman and rented by Love and her partner in love and business, Romain Gateau. Inside, two rooms – one slightly larger than the other – will permanently house Love's work along with a rotating milieu of local artists Love and Gateau have developed a fondness for; "These are artists I believe in and respect," says Love, "This gallery isn't about being politically correct and promoting artists who Romain and I think will bring in the most money. It's a gallery and salon that will be filled with work we truly love and artists we really want to see succeed."

Evo (a.k.a. Yvonne Grams) admits that 40% of her desire to start a gallery was to exhibit her own work which has found intermittent gallery homes since she began taking her art seriously. But it is her abrasive relationship with Miami gallerists that propelled her to stake her place and find a room of her own. "I've had so many bad experiences with Miami gallery owners that I knew if I didn't find my own space, the frustration would drive me crazy or kill me... well I'm not ready to die." Instead Love and Gateau hope not only Love's but other artist's work will thrive at Stash, and create a new niche in Miami – a salon and space created by artists, for artists.

Whether she knew it or not, Stash has been a long time coming for Love. Growing up poor and emotionally neglected in Daytona Beach, Florida, she didn't live with her biological father and played constant dodge and hide with her abusive mother, doing anything to avoid her wrath and beatings. The family moved to Daytona Beach in 1973 after her mother fell in love with the state's palm trees and emerald beaches on a trip there during her honeymoon with her second husband. A biker town then and now, growing up in Daytona was not an easy ride for Love. "Let's just say money and love were not easy to come by." It doesn't take a team of therapists to see why her art moniker became Evo Love.

At 15, after a car accident killed one of her best friends (Love was also in the car but escaped injury) and finding no direction in Daytona's stifling creative atmosphere she moved with a friend to Miami Beach. Its major draw: "I loved Mickey Rourke then and when I found out he lived and owned a bar there, my decision was made," she laughs. Love's fire for what would become her life's passion was ignited at

17 when she began to attach toys, vintage items, and modern objects she had been collecting all her young life to an old school chair she found in her Miami Beach neighborhood. It was so compelling a collector immediately bought her second piece, a table lamp. The teenager knew then she wanted to make art a part of her life forever. Tending bar and working odd jobs to keep herself afloat, in her early thirties she decided to make art her full-time job, sacrificing material comforts to live out her dreams.

Her art has been influenced by her mother's love of rock and roll, her stepfather's vintage cars and her own inexplicable attraction to 1950s Pin-up girls like the legendary Betty Page. Her art became an unusual and provocative amalgam of found objects, occasional poetry, photographs and painted surfaces. She fuses found objects, her "treasures," into completely one-of-a-kind creations that defy traditional expectations. Her signature dominoes, dice, bullets, dolls, pearls and marbles along with found tarot cards, playing cards, bottle caps, eight balls and countless other bits of detritus, form an unusual and uncommon body of work. "My work is about death and rebirth. It's about bringing discarded objects back to life, giving them a new purpose through my art."

Those discarded objects can be found not on conventional canvases but on old school desks, chalkboards, rough pieces of wood, lampshades, mannequins and mirrors. Almost any surface is her palette, playground and workspace. Love expresses her sexuality, love, anger, political and social outrage and unchanneled childlike naiveté and sweetness through her distinctly recognizable pieces that are sometimes shocking, always unique and continually thought-provoking. It is work that has developed a fervent fan base and is collected nationally and internationally.

Looking at Love's pieces the observer soon sees that they defy quick interpretations.

They are not simple black and white, love or hate works of art. They must be absorbed and contemplated, their complexity encouraging intellectual interaction with the work. One never forgets an Evo Love piece once it enters one's consciousness and she has had collectors who have called her to buy one or two years after seeing her art in a gallery or a show.

At Stash, Love's work can be viewed on a regular basis, there for her fans, collectors and other artists to see its ever evolving themes and the associated objects she invests in each theme. "My work isn't for everyone," Love acknowledges, "but I think most people will find something in my work that resonates in them, some part of their experience that I've captured. I've been through so much in my life that my pain is universal. I can relate to almost anyone and what they're going through in their lives. Art has been my salvation."

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