

Starving for her art

A Miami artist says that she would have rather starved than work at jobs she hated. Her art she says was more important than money.

By Andrea Marie Thompson

no compromises



Two years ago Miami artist Evo Love gave up everything to make her art the focal point of her life. She decided that in order to gain recognition and become a successful artist, she had to concentrate solely on what she loved to do most. No compromises, just sacrifice and survival. She stayed in about five homes in as many months. Friends fed her. Her only bills were the storage fees she paid every few weeks, or as often as she could without having her possessions thrown away, and her cellphone. She had no credit, she had no car.

Love didn't know it then, but her decision was a momentous one that would frame and define her life. It took her on a muddy journey that resulted in severed ties from what she thought were good friends, polarized her internally and exposed her to the contempt of almost everyone. She's also learned that passion could consume her so much that on many days it was enough to replace her need for food, a bed, a roof over her head. She substituted those natural desires with a singular vision and a vow to herself: Every dime I make will be from my art.

acute desperation



The starving artist is a cliché. We know that. Evo's homeless, hungry life is an anomaly in an era with many options available for eking out even the barest living wage, especially for a smart, pretty, sexy girl. Friends wound her with criticism every day. "Why don't you find a job like everyone else. You can work on your art part-time." They imply that she's lazy; using her art as an excuse to avoid the stress and struggles of the working life. Not that she has never worked. She has. Hard. For twelve years, Evo was a fixture in every cool bar on South Beach, mixing drinks till 4 in the morning for fellow artists, athletes, drug dealers, junkies, models and celebs. She even had a brief run up (and down) a pole one year in the nineties as a New Orleans stripper during the off-season when money was tight and the food was running out.

Then the panic attacks started, probably psychosomatic, brought on by her acute desperation to move on. The music, the smoke, the inane conversations, the fights with cheap tippers, the men coming on to her every night, the back-stabbing of competitive bartenders culminated in her first hospital visit to Mount Sinai. Her racing heart and erratic thoughts convinced her she was having a heart attack. They got worse after that. She knew she had to make a change but what to do next? Even though she had been making her art pieces since she was 17, she had never gotten any serious money for them. Many she had given away, others she sold for as little as \$150. Their market value at any time determined by how needy she was: For a pair of shoes, a CD, pot.

stifling atmosphere



She left bartending and tried to do other jobs. First there was the office job at her friend's accounting firm. After a week they cursed each other out and she was gone – the stifling atmosphere of the office, she decided, was not for her. Then there was a stint as a casting agent, finding extras for short and independent films shooting in the Miami area. That lasted until the work dried up and when the next season began she couldn't be bothered to try again. She has organized art shows, cleaned houses, washed down boats, couriered nefarious products, counted drug money, been a house-sitter, babysat, tutored kids on art, been a catering assistant but nothing stuck.

The need to work on her art full-time began to consume her. She had been living on hope for a total of fifteen years, making art a marginal part of her life while doing everything else. Hoping to be discovered. Hoping a connected collector would buy one of her pieces, hoping the "right" gallery (and one that wouldn't "rip me off") would represent her work, hoping even that a silent investor would come along and support her so that she could fully concentrate on what she loves to do best: scour Miami streets, alleyways, garage sales, flea markets, even garbage bins for the found objects she incorporates into her mixed media creations. So two years ago when neither the jobs nor her art was getting her anywhere and hope started to dim, it scared her enough to make a decision: "I'm not working for anyone else. I just want to work on my art." She gave up

everything so she wouldn't have to rely on a paycheck.

bullets, dolls, toy cars



Yvonne's art is often as chaotic and poetic as her life. Dice and dominoes are her signatures. Is it surprising? Their good luck/bad luck odds are a metaphor for her life. Bullets, dolls, toy cars, costume jewelry, love potions, scraps of paper with fortune cookie predictions, "People find it hard to resist your persuasive manner," pictures of icons like Naomi Campbell and Betty Paige, fifties swimsuit models, bottle caps, tarot cards with pictures of half-moons and stars, even chess pieces, somehow, some way come together to form a unique message on every one of her art pieces. Love, sex, loneliness, violence, beauty and death are given the Evo Love spin on schoolchairs, broken glass, salvaged bits of wood, surfboards, even skateboards. They are all her canvas and all form a lovely jumbled, colorful, tactile and picturesque feast when they're done; the sacrifices you know she makes to create them make them even sweeter, in a perverse way, to possess.

She never meant to be this type of artist. But her rough upbringing and early education on the streets of Daytona Beach, honed her laser vision for the world around her. She had to pay attention to the details of her daily life in order to survive, but in doing so she began to see the beauty in everyday things. The detritus of other people's life became the treasures that she works with. A discarded mirror, an abandoned bench or trunk; a forgotten box of bullets, inspire her to write stories told in art. "People buy things and then they're bored with them.

After they're thrown out, I make these pieces important again." Everyday objects take on new meanings in Evo's World and have unique emotional resonance for those who look at or buy her pieces. Childhood playthings like dolls, marbles and fake money find their way over and over into her art no matter the theme of the object because she whispers, "I never had a childhood, I always had to deal with some bullshit, so using toys in my work brings my childhood back to me." Her commitment to collecting photos of pinup girls and other artifacts from the twenties through the fifties call, she says, to her old soul. The child and the wise old woman reside in the same body.

"people don't work for their dreams"



Everyone around Evo became frustrated by her antiquated, down-and-dirty devotion to seeing her dreams through. It came off as a lack of concern for her own day-to-day needs. "Yvonne where are you sleeping tonight?" "Yvonne, did you eat today?" She knew how she chooses to live, homeless, not knowing where her next meal is coming from, is stupefying for most adults. They roll their eyes and add up the judgment list in their head. "I don't want to live like this," she pleads. "I know what people think of me, but I'm not taking attitude from anybody anymore for \$10 an hour."

Last year Evo made a total of about \$12,000 from the sale of her work, most of it from ardent collectors who have followed her career for years. Although pieces have been shown at local galleries she doesn't trust gallery owners in general; she believes their 60% fees are theft. So just recently she opened up a gallery, Stash(six months rent free), with her boyfriend of two years, a fellow artist, hoping they'll be able to create an experience for artists that they haven't been able to find:

“People don't work for their dreams, they work for somebody else's... I believe in work... but I see a lot of people losing their spirit in jobs they hate and then 20 years later they're trying to find themselves. That's one thing about me, I know myself. I know what makes me happy; I didn't bury it under years of working corporate, or hiding my true self under someone else's dream. I'm very proud of that about myself... I believe in myself a lot more now than before. I realized a long time ago that I'm my only cheerleader when it comes down to it. Sometimes my Pompoms are held high and sometimes my Pompoms are down low but they're mine.”