

artist of the week



ROXANNE AMICO

INTERVIEW BY PETER KOCH PHOTO BY ROSE MATTREY

Why you should know who she is: Artist and activist Roxanne Amico is a working artist, which means she does just that—works. Between juggling several roles in local activism and her house cleaning business, she focuses her energy on mixed-media collage while also writing essays and poetry and performing spoken word essays and poetry. Her writing has appeared online in both the *Buffalo Report* and *News From Below*, and she has been a guest commentator on WBFO. Her numerous social justice causes include Women in Black, the Visions for a Better World Project and the Peace Education Fund.

Why mixed-media collage? “The medium lends itself well to developing a visual vocabulary for describing and translating my experiences. Also, it is a way to seek order in chaos, peace in conflict, wholeness in fragmentation, and creative action in the context of destructive action.”

How long does it take you to create a collage? “41 years. (laughs) I think the process is the encapsulation. That gathering of the materials of your life and seeing what works together and if it works together, sort of weaving all of those different experiences together.”

On being an artist-activist: “I can’t do just art. The relationship between art and activism is that artists and activists do the same thing—they work directly to make the world a better place. Art is the vehicle of empathy in any culture, and activists need that kind of empathy and community building to help their causes. Artist-activists can help bridge the gaps that exist between various social justice causes by helping them recognize that the perceived differences existing between their causes are not as important as what they hold in common.”

Recent works: “Five Sacred Things From This End of the World,” a series of six mixed-media collages. The series explores the nature of the sacred in human life in relationship to the world at large. To see her ongoing work, Amico has a display at Mid-City Office Furniture in the Tri-Main Center, which she updates periodically.

How did you become interested in art? “It was a combination of family influence and visceral experience. I have an aunt and an uncle who I identify as artists. They created everything they did. My aunt, specifically, made her own clothes her whole life. My uncle was a woodworker, a carpenter. He

turned things that were junk into something that you could live with and enjoy. My father taught English, and he was an immigrant from Sicily. He was always writing and encouraging me to write. My mother constantly paid attention to her environment and turned it into something personal. They didn’t have a lot of money, so it was just another way of turning their life experiences into something that was theirs, and then was all of ours,” says Amico. “Also, with art I liked the visceral engagement of my body with the paint brush on paper. With writing I have early experiences of playing with a typewriter and saying, ‘I want to be a writer someday.’ So it wasn’t always a creative thing, it was a visceral feeling—my body wanted to do this as much as my heart wanted to.”

What’s the importance of history to your art? “All of my work brings everything from my life into a concentrated space that represents how I’m experiencing the moment in the context of my personal history and my culture’s political history. It’s impossible for me to ignore the relationship between my life and the history of my culture—both the good and the bad. I’m always looking for a visual vocabulary to describe that while I work.”

In the works: An expansion of the “Five Sacred Things” series, and a collection of short stories told from children’s points of view, which she intends to eventually have published.

Favorite outdoor places: “Any place that has a sense of history and recovery from the ravages of time, which is one way of interpreting history. I love the Valley of Fire in Nevada for that reason, and the Adirondacks.”

What books are you currently reading? “I always read more than one book at a time. It’s usually like 12. (laughs) Right now I’m reading *Just Six Numbers* by Martin Rees, and *Watership Down* by Richard Adams.”

What would you be doing if you weren’t an artist-activist? “I’d be living in a fire tower, studying birds, earthworms and marine biology (don’t ask), while chasing tornadoes, writing children’s books and labor organizing for the workers of the world who are being exploited by unfair trade policies. Or maybe I’d be an alchemist, and I’d try to find a way to meld those interests together.”

For more info on Roxanne, visit her Web site at www.spiritmorphstudio.com. 