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CASCADIA WEEKLY

18



BY AMY KEPFERLE

Work

PASSION VERSUS PAYCHECK

HAVE YOU heard the anecdote about the guy who toiled for decades at a mundane job he detested whacking the alarm clock for only to retire, move to a senior community somewhere in Florida and drop dead of a massive coronary within a year of quitting the daily grind?

If so, you're likely well aware that, if you're not doing something with your life that engages you in at least one meaningful way, an early demise will be even more tragic for everybody involved.

Bellingham artist Ruthie V—who manages to imbue every exhibit she's involved in with much deeper meaning than what can be seen on the canvases she prolifically produces—has tackled the subject of people and their careers in her latest exhibit, "Work," which opened earlier this month at Edison's Smith & Vallee Gallery.

"I found a way for my passion and talent to be my work, so who I am

and what I do for work are inseparable," she says of her musings behind the tricky topic. "I'm fortunate. When I've tried to do work that didn't suit me it was deeply uncomfortable and devaluing. It dampened my mind, it tortured my spirit and it broke my body. I know people do work that is outside their talents and passions every day."

To help communicate the visions that arose when she began to approach the subject matter, Ruthie V used a variety of unconventional materials to help get her point across. Cement, gold leaf, graphite, stain and other experimental tools of the trade were utilized, proving that even when somebody's doing something they love—in her case, producing art—there should always be wiggle room when it comes to how a job is carried out.

"Saint Barista," for example, used ink and metallic acrylic on paper to showcase a coffee purveyor with an orange halo bringing a cup of joe to an anonymous table. "Fishing" showed off a cadre of small boats on the water rendered with acrylic

paint—and crayons. The abstract "Scaffolding" used alkyd, cement and litho pencil. "Hanging Work," which one suspects was inspired by true-life toiling, was painted on linen using oil and metallic acrylic.



SEE IT

WHAT: Ruthie V's "Work"

WHEN: 11am-5pm every Wed.-Sun. through Oct. 31

WHERE: Smith & Vallee Gallery, 5742 Gilkey Ave., Edison

COST: Entry is free

INFO: www.smithandvallee.com

"I want the materials I use to be an integral part of the experience," Ruthie V explains of her unconventional methods. "I want the image, concept and application of the materials all working together to communicate."

When asked what inspired the show, Ruthie V—who also uses

her talents as a color consultant to help supplement her income—says she was working on a new house alongside roofers, carpenters and other craftspeople to bring the abode into being.

"I thought of Gustave Caillebotte's painting 'The Floor Scrapers' and how beautiful people are when they're good at what they do," she says. "To see people using their bodies to build this massive and intricate structure was absolutely magnificent. Counter to the physical and creative strength of people, there was looming instability. The economy had turned for the worse and many people weren't sure they were going to have enough work to stay afloat. I decided to use my show to talk about Work." ☺