

Artist's 'Golden Year' brings 23 pairs of shoes

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If you spy artist Samantha Marie Sanchez bespectacled in her pink, lens-less glasses, know that she's most likely hyper-focused.

She discovered the glasses frames in the midst of a house party, and after inquiring about their source, was gifted them by the owner. Sanchez dons the specs in order to find concentration and calm, and those around her know that when she whips them out, she's diving deep into a project.

There's a tongue-in-cheek irony to wearing them as Sanchez has 20-20 vision. They also give her confidence when she's feeling self-conscious and, in a way, relate to her questions about beauty standards that commonly come up in her art making. What the beholder considers attractive is explored in her upcoming exhibition, "Golden Year," at The Nan Boynton Memorial Gallery, which will open on May 3 with an artist talk at 6:30 p.m.

"I just turned 23 on the 23rd which makes it my 'golden year,'" explains Sanchez of the birthday tradition. "That's where my idea for the show came from, so I made 23 shoes. I hate high heels, but I still find them beautiful."

Moving from Miami to Tallahassee for school, Sanchez earned her AA from TCC before attending and completing FSU's BFA art program. As an amasser of objects, she uses materials from her childhood toy collections, scavenges in stores and online, and even delves into her grandmother's hoard of possessions.

Sanchez' first pair of shoes came from her roommate after a dog chewed through her sparkly pair of Steve Madden heels. She nailed tacks into them, thinking about the common idiom that beauty is pain, but was surprised by the wide range of responses she received by viewers at her BFA exhibition. One gentleman bent down to see the shoes and said he completely understood the pun which made them "tacky shoes."

She'll soon complete her master's in art education at FSU, and themes on innocence and beauty are still central to many of Sanchez' soft sculpture installations. She also aims to make work that is friendly for all audiences, while posing serious questions. She considers local artist Tenee' Hart a mentor and influence, after taking her art class at FSU, and following a prompt to make a self-portrait out of shoes that later inspired her high heels project.

"I like artists who create installations that are like other worlds," says Sanchez. "I don't like leaving the floor out of it because I think it adds to the world and makes it feel like a room you'd live in. I also like controlling the audience. I know if I put something on the floor the viewer is going to bend down to look at it."

Sanchez creates barriers and builds a space so that a viewer is guided through her world. In previous exhibitions this manifested as a layering of crayons to make pathways. For "Golden Year," colored rice, dominoes — both nods to her Hispanic heritage — crayons, and beer caps will direct attendees through the space.

Sanchez claims hot glue as her best friend with many projects requiring large amounts of it. She often takes an entire day to work on one object until completion, whereas larger projects,



Samantha Marie Sanchez created 23 shoes for her 'Golden Year' project. SAMANTHA MARIE SANCHEZ



Samantha Marie Sanchez will soon complete her master's in art education at FSU. ALEXA RODRIGUEZ

like her upholstered denim chair, can take up to a week.

Pink may be her signature color, but she does not limit her color palette, and many pieces in the upcoming exhibition include gold items. Like her teaching philosophy states, coloring outside the lines and making bold choices are pillars that Sanchez stands by in art for not only herself, but also her students.

She'll finish this spring as a graduate intern with students at Springwood Elementary, and is hoping to enter a similar role post-grad. Though growing up she witnessed her mother as a teacher, and now principal, at school, Sanchez never envisioned pursuing a similar career.

"I want my students to be able to make their own decisions," says Sanchez. "Pick whatever colors you want, and allow them to take control of what

If you go

What: Golden Year

When: Soft Opening/Artist Talk at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 3; Opening Night at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 4. Exhibition runs through May 25

Where: The Nan Boynton Memorial Gallery, 621 Industrial Drive

Cost: Free admission

Contact: For more information, visit <https://samanthamarie3.wixsite.com/samanthamarie>.

they find intriguing. I don't want them to feel like they're looking for my approval."

When the FSU art education program was presented to her, it sparked an epiphany that she was always meant to be a teacher. She says that blending her worlds in art creates a pleasant overlap, allowing both worlds to coexist. Art helps her to not only deal with struggles related to image, but also be able to facilitate conversations around it.

"I just want to create an environment where people are forced to talk about it, where you see toys everywhere, mirrors, and women cut out of magazines," describes Sanchez. "Why wouldn't I go into the field of education? Those are

the people who need someone to talk to about those subjects the most, and it makes sense to do that through art."

As a former intern at 621 Gallery, Sanchez is excited to showcase her first solo exhibition in the Nan Boynton Memorial Gallery. Even though she'll be walking in her master's ceremony graduation on the day of its opening, she looks forward to hearing how attendees choose to interpret and form opinions around her work.

She remarks on how rewarding it is to see all ages, especially children, take in the worlds she creates in all its wild colors, objects loaded with memory, and playful bric-a-brac. Sanchez feels emboldened to enter the field of art education and try to reach out to as many students as possible.

"I found just seeing them make art every day to be fascinating and thought about how this is going to fuel my artist work for the rest of my life," reflects Sanchez. "I like breaking kids out of that mold of thinking they have to be perfect at something. It's a world that doesn't have rules for artists. It's a world that's about art, but it's not about me, it's for the kids."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).