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Featured Artists:
Rosetta and
Charles Bentz



Rosetta and Charles Bentz,
Long Island City, New York.

Finding the perfect fit: art in life and love

By Crystal Englert, SA Assistant Editor

"I didn't think I had an artistic bone in my body," says Rosetta, an abstract painter. At 30, she first turned to art to cover bare walls, then hid her decorations because they embarrassed her. An artist friend found her covert creations, though, and coerced Rosetta into taking classes.

The full-time workingwoman studied portraiture, experimented with collage and papermaking, and eventually took up pottery and sculpture. Her artistry was affirmed after displaying collages at a YMCA event, and she's been showing her work ever since.

Two years ago, her black-and-white "doodles," as she calls them, were chosen for Artists in Cellophane. The unique venue concept uses recycled cigarette or candy vending machines to dispense tiny original artwork. Rosetta's Portraits of Humanity sketches are offered in select

machines throughout the country.

Most of her attention is concentrated on painting because "that's what I love the most," she says. "The more I painted, the more confident I became. With more confidence, I liked my work more, liked myself. When I don't paint for a while, I'm a miserable person."

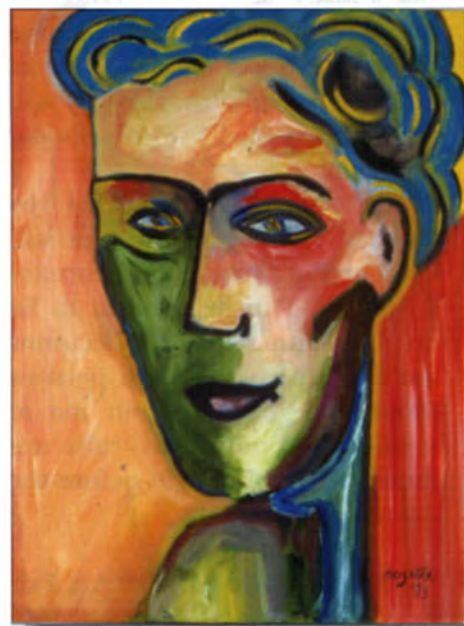
Collages loosen her up if she's stuck, but generally, she lets her gut guide her — each painting is



Rosetta's *Goddess*, 15x30, oil on canvas



Rosetta's *Red*, 18x24, oil on canvas



Rosetta's *Karl*, 18x24, oil on canvas

the reflection of a moment's mood. Often replacing canvas with tin, wood or masonite for additional texture, Rosetta paints with only a palette knife and oils. She never begins with a sketch and rarely has a complete concept in mind; a work expresses a single facet of her many intricacies.

As for the future, "I love to paint, so I want to spend my time doing that more," she says. "I'm growing and changing, and I'm excited about it. It doesn't scare me. I want to develop."

"I knew that I loved to draw," says Charles, a painter and former illustrator. As a child, "I would draw around the house, sprawled out on the floor. That's what I liked to do." His father and grandfather were both artists, but Charles credits his career to his watercolorist aunt.

"She was always bombarding me with art supplies and paper to draw on," he says. She also encouraged the six-year-old tike to enter a Crayola drawing contest. He won. "They sent me a check for a dollar, and at the time, it was a lot of money."

A few years later, 35 cents would get him into live shows at Paramount Theater. And performers such as Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra were strong temptations to skip class. Nevertheless,



Charles' *At Rest*, 10x14, oil on masonite

Charles did well at the School of Industrial Art, forgoing college after graduation to enlist in the Army and pursue illustration full time.

He worked for a few agencies before becoming an established freelancer. "I didn't want to work for anybody else," says Charles. "I worked for myself, had good clients." Career highlights include album covers for Elvis Presley and Willie Nelson, as well as relationships with companies like RCA — and Crayola.

When companies recently started turning to computers for their illustration needs, Charles saw it as an opportunity to explore portraiture. "I didn't want to paint with a computer. I'm an artist, not a computer person. I want to have a brush in my hand, something free and easy."

He's still a member, as was Normal Rockwell, of the Society of Illustrators, but Charles has changed his focus. Instead of

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Charles' *Pueblo Village Creek*, 16x20, oil on canvas



Charles' *Cape May Porch*, 9x12, oil on canvas

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many techniques (from cartooning to painting) and extreme detail, he's pursuing oils to capture images just impressionistic enough not to look like photographs. He always works from a sketch or snapshot, but says, "I'm trying to loosen up as I get older."

Slowing down, apparently, is something he hasn't considered. As an eighth-degree black belt, the 68-year-old teaches karate. He speaks at schools "to help the young people coming up in the art business." He teaches aeronautical aerobatics. He sails. And he uses all as inspiration.

"I can find things to paint anywhere," he says. "You look at something, and it gives you a feeling of being nice and easy and beautiful. It's good for the soul. Then there are times I like to turn a plane upside down."

Seven years ago, the two oil painters were married. Rosetta and Charles Bentz of Long Island City, New York, have strikingly different artistic backgrounds and directions. But their distinctions somehow highlight their individual strengths.

"When our works are side by side, it's amazing how they look really good together," says Rosetta. "They compliment each other — not always, and we don't plan it, but it works out that way."

"People love the kind of stuff she does, and I hope they like what I do," Charles says. "I don't think [the art] conflicts. I love it when they love her work, because she's good, she's really good."

Although they never collaborate on pieces, the show-circuit couple submits slides together,

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and the twosome is often accepted by the same shows. To refuel, Charles flies Rosetta to New England or the Midwest for painting holidays. "The scenery is out of this world," he says.

Other than these excursions, the two worked separately, each in their own studio, until two years ago. Charles had shared workspace with an illustrator friend earlier in his career, and Rosetta had enjoyed working with other developing artists in class — but neither was sure how working with their mate would be. When they decided to save on expenses by working in a single studio, both were "leery."

"I was a little worried that we would get in each other's way, but it works beautifully," says Rosetta. "We're not there at the same time often. When we are, we stay out of each other's way, talk, give opinions. ... Working with him was a pleasant surprise."

Charles, too, enjoys the camaraderie and mutual advice.

"I'm lucky to have someone around who's an artist," he says. "Even though [she works in a] different direction, she has an eye for color and design. Many times she's right; sometimes I'm right."

Has working together led to any conflict? So far, the strengths of their relationship have carried over: "I think we're really honest," says Rosetta. "We both like each other's work, and we respect each other."

Sharing space has changed the way they create, Rosetta says, "not on purpose," but by "just being in the studio, looking at each other's work. ... If there's another artist around, you don't have to talk — there's a vibe. Something about having him there bounces off, even when we're not talking." And it's good, she says: "I think I need to firm up a bit more, and he needs to loosen up."

Both plan to keep adapting and exploring, in their art and with each other. "Hopefully," says Charles, "[we'll] keep doing what [we're] doing and enjoying the hell out of it." ☼

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