

Nina Rossi



Artist Nina Rossi is the real deal. Meeting with Rossi in her Turners Falls home, shared with husband (and musician) Caleb Wetherbee, and in which Rossi has spent half of her life, is like tumbling into an action-packed Alice-in-Wonderland dream of personal and intense homages to family, self, and the human condition. Rossi's gritty life path and deep observations, which could be the stories of many people, are filtered through her rich and imaginative inner life, translating into art that is powerful, accessible and terrifically unique.

Texturing even her main living spaces, Rossi's art is multi-media and multi-dimensional paintings, clay, fabric, molded mice sculptures, "junk sculpture" and, a newer foray for Rossi, her music. In her living room is a sexy, powerful-looking electric bass guitar. Rossi explains that she saw one in a guitar show and just knew it had to be hers.

Moving through to her two studio spaces (a construction room and a sewing room) the visitor encounters a maelstrom of materials, adhesive and molding compounds, and power tools. What you see is perhaps not what you were expecting, if you're thinking traditional, "safe" art work. "I do what is necessary for me. I'm not interested in the pretty thing. Eventually, though, the pieces sell."

Rossi's materials include, but are definitely not limited to metal, wax, resin, clay, wood, fabric, "found materials", and a glorious tangle of industrial bits and pieces. "Things find me. I find things." She frequents the Turners Falls shop Loot, and watches for odd pieces as she moves through the world. One of the quirkiest of her recent finds is a cast iron baby's arm that appears to have once been attached to a larger



object.

Rossi has been a member of the Shelburne Artist's Cooperative since 1997. She continues to exhibit her highly-textured mixed media wall paintings; dolls made of old bottle caps, cogs, old condiment tins, faux jewels; tiny, happy slugs; mirror frames painted made out of found objects.

Rossi is the owner of Nina's Nook & Nina Studio described by the artist as an "itsy bitsy" gallery, featuring her work and other selected artists. The gallery, located at 125A Avenue A, offers funky sculptures, 2-D wall art, jewelry, her well-known slugs and "pocket wheels" which are handbags made from recycled Eddie's Wheels dog cart wheels, and so much more. Go visit!

The space is an example of Rossi's "making do with what you have" ethic, where she has created an inviting, non-pretentious art gallery out of what was the a bottle depository for the former candy store, Equi's. The space, a tiny "hole in the wall", was dark and hard-used. Rossi restored it, creating a welcoming, well-lit space with intriguing art work filling its walls, as well as the 20-foot alleyway she rescued from neglect, in back of the gallery.

Born in Chicago, where Rossi lived until she was 7 years old before moving to Baltimore, in both places she went to Saturday morning art lessons. Her parents, both sociologists--her father doing survey design and evaluation, and her mother a founder of the National Organization of Women and specializing in family, sexuality, gender and feminism. "My work" says Rossi, "has that kind of sociological vision. This is where my perspective comes from."



Early on Rossi was drawn to sculpting, and cartooning. And, she explains, "public school was not kind to my rebellious, artistic creativity. I was a cartoonist early on. It was bawdy, humorous always." She visited the principal's office more than once because of her cartoons.

"Withdrawn, an outcast, I was always doing art", said Rossi, who would create dolls and dollhouses, "making miniature worlds come to life. I clobbered and hacked my way through. It was a mental health thing, really."

Her parents moved them to Amherst when they took positions at UMass. At 15 she began drinking. "I was not used to the college town culture I was dropped into in Amherst. It was a rich, privileged culture. Alcohol was a link to the rest of the world, a path to communication." At 16 she got her own apartment "where it was all about the drinking diet". Within a short time she moved to Provincetown during "the last gasp of the fishing industry", where she ran the winch in a fishing wharf, a male-dominated place. "It was a sucky, sucky job. It was a really hard environment".

Said Rossi, "I was used to risky behavior. I moved in with a guy, an abusive Vietnam Vet, and became his 'old lady' at 17." At 19 Rossi tried to leave the relationship, but through a series of circumstances was unable to leave. "At 26, I was able to escape." Rossi returned home, where she got her Class 2 License, and then, a job at Pelham Auto Workers Cooperative where she managed the auto parts store. "It was a family, a good place to be. There was love, appreciation in what was again a male environment. It appealed to that rebellious, contrary issue of mine".

It was there that she met her first husband, and, in 1987 she bought her house in the former industrial town of Turner Falls, located halfway up the hill. It gives her both quiet space in which to create, and a connection to the lively and downtown Turners Falls community.

During this time Rossi had two sons, and with the help of her parents, took night classes at Greenfield Community College with the initial goal of becoming a reference librarian. “It’s the search for information in both.” She segued into the Art Program and received her AS in Studio Art. She followed this up by being accepted into the Ada Comstock Program at Smith College and receiving her BA there. Studying mostly history, science and creative writing, she won awards in several prestigious poetry contests. Unable initially to find a job after graduating, Rossi for a year ran a brown bag lunch service out of her kitchen, for private school



students (they called her “The Lunch Fairy”).

Subsequently Rossi worked as Production Manager, Fabricator and Inventory Manager at Eddie’s Pet Wheels; she wrote the Arts Column for The Recorder. Now she freelances as a graphic designer as well as creating her art and the ever-changing Nina’s Nook.

Artist, writer, poet, cartoonist, “closet sociologist”, Rossi is a Renaissance woman with an upbringing and tough life decisions that have created her choices of vocation and avocation. Fearless and wildly inquisitive and creative, Rossi peers into the human psyche, including her own, mining the gritty truth of what it is to be human. The result? Art that isn’t afraid. Art that may be provocative, powerful, sad, whimsical, risky, or fun. And without fail, interesting.

Nina's website: www.ninastudio.net