



FROM THE PRATT INSTITUTE TO THE DARKENED CORNERS OF CITY STREETS, YEN TAKES A LOOK AT THE ARTIST SWOON AND THE JOURNEY THAT'S PUT HER WHERE SHE IS TODAY

Swoon hit the streets back in 1999. A painting student of the prestigious Pratt Institute, frustrations soon led the young artist on a quest for the new. Welcome Swoon, the quiet avenger of beauty in the public space. Her work can be found peeling off the city of New York's alleyways, buildings and brick walls. Beautiful and fragile paper cut outs, lovingly applied, she creates portraits of the city's inhabitants and in turn a portrait of the city.

Swoon's work uses public space as an inclusive element to express meaning. Politically fuelled with a touch of anarchy, her paper cuts ask you to question the ideas we have about public space and community along with our civil freedoms.

#### THE PROCESS OF HER CREATIONS

A labour of love, her art is created at home taking up to two weeks for a single character to come to life. Painstakingly, layers are cut out of recycled newsprint and then pasted in the streets often in the middle of the day in public view.

There is no expectation of permanency. Left to their own devices, Swoon's works will age, discolour, peel and rot like they have their own life force. "I try to create something that has a kind of life cycle. It goes up and has this blossoming and decays also," she explains. From her individual ventures to her collaborative projects, Swoon has an ability to take on the discarded parts of life and make them both appealing and socially interactive.

#### AN ART POSSE FORMS

She formed the Toyshop Collective with companions looking for a new avenue for their art, but more over a new means interrelating art and living.

The collective instigate spontaneous community activity from getting kids to work on group drawings and then pasting them over billboards in the city (is it vandalism when it sounds so innocent?) or creating a 'junkyard band' where anyone can grab a can, a stick, or maybe just sing really loud and get involved making ruckus through the city streets, positively of course. "We're not trying to be destructive. We just do things that we think should happen. Whether or not everyone thinks it improves the space is irrelevant. It's about doing something positive. Seeing an opening for doing it and just actually doing it."

#### THEN THERE WAS MONEY TO BE MADE

Like so many street artists of late, Swoon's work has generated interest amongst exhibitors and collectors alike. Having initially looked away from the galleries, Swoon began to make her entry. Exhibiting first in collaborations, her first solo exhibition came about in 2005 for the pinnacle contemporary NY gallery Deitch. A perfect representation of her work, the streets were re-created within the gallery walls.

#### FROM THE STREETS TO THE RIVER

So from here to parties with Damien Hirst and signature lines in Tokyo? Not quite. After the Deitch show, Swoon was back on the random track, this time fulfilling a fantasy of building a boat (environmentally friendly of course) and was soon floating down the Mississippi on the 'Miss Rockaway Armada'. True to form, this project came about as a large collaborative effort of like-minded individuals in a quest to explore alternative models for the way we live. Damn hippies. ☺

