

## Feature Article

Line Dance

Is Sonya Paz the Picasso of our time?

By Traci Vogel

The line between graphics and fine art is steady, rhythmic and black, at least at the end of Sonya Paz's paintbrush. Paz, a Silicon Valley native, worked as a graphic artist for Apple Computer in the 1980s, "back when cut and paste was literally cut and paste." Now, with two teenage boys nearly out of the house, she has returned to the dirty stuff: painting.

Paz's candy-colored artwork is populated by cartoonish women, jazzy landscapes and delectable glasses of merlot, all delineated by an exuberant black border that recalls Roy Lichtenstein's pop art. Paz also cites Pablo Picasso's cubism as an influence for the abstraction and flattening of objects on her canvases; a guitar's strings jut across its body like whiskers, a horizon overlaps an object in front of it. Of course, where once Picasso and Lichtenstein painted out of the rebel's toolbox, these days their style is hardly shocking, so it's not as if Paz is working somewhere on the fringe. Which is just fine with her.



"I like to take the most modest of subjects and sort of amplify it," says Paz, giving a tour of her Lafayette Street studio, which is so crowded with her work that the walls glow like stained glass. "I went through a lot of things [before I found] a style that's really me.... People say, 'Oh, this would look good in a kid's room.' Well, there's a reason: Kids like color."

Paz, whose vivacious demeanor and bouncy black curls belie the fact that she has two nearly-grown kids, has given titles to her series of paintings such as "Eye Adventure" and "Candy Roulette," both of which describe her style well. "I'm very visual," she explains. She is inspired by the sensuality of food, wine and music.

And language. A play on words will set off a synesthetic imaginative response. In her car at a stoplight one morning, Paz glanced at the truck next to her, and thought its logo said "Water Flirtation." "It actually said 'water filtration,' of course," grins Paz, "But it got me thinking: If water *could* fall in love, if it *could* flirt... what would that look like?" The result is a luscious blue painting, its calligraphic black line keeping the cool hues separate.

Paz's vibrant colors lend themselves to posters for art, food and music festivals. She has even been commissioned to paint wine labels. Now, she's branching out into furniture, watches, pillows, maybe even rugs. The graphic artist in her wants to color the world.

"I don't want to be an artist with yet another coffee mug," Paz says. "I don't paint because I think I know what people like. I paint what I like."

And, she adds, "I like what I paint; I like how it makes me feel. That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

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*The Sonya Paz Fine Art Gallery (1793 Lafayette St., Suite 110, Santa Clara) is open to the public Monday thru Friday; or call (408) 294-7900 for an appointment. Watches and more can be purchased at: [www.sonyapaz.com](http://www.sonyapaz.com)*

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