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Antoinette Wysocki was never keen on the idea of the starving artist. For her, the term conjures up images of 20-somethings fresh out of art school that spend their days peddling their earnest canvases and eating Raman noodles to survive.

Not so for Wysocki. She knew she wanted to be an artist from a young age, but she also knew she needed to eat. Since she started painting, she's held a variety of jobs: a buyer for [Versace](#), teacher and wine buyer, to name a few. Her latest business project is [PRZman.com](#), a lifestyle site for men. Each job had the single purpose to "support her art."

Now her art is speaking for itself. Her vibrant collage-like paintings have garnered international recognition, and next spring she will exhibit her work in Hong Kong and London. She's also collaborating with [Piecco Pang](#), a handbag designer in Hong Kong. Pang is turning Wysocki's paintings into limited edition handbags that will be available in the spring of 2012.

At a distance, Wysocki's pieces are often beautiful, sometimes haunting. Up close is when one begins to notice the details that bring the piece together. Whether it's the gold chains in "All that Glitters," or the playfully placed OMFG in "Oh My Fucking God," each piece forces the viewer to take a second look.

"There's a strength in her personality and presentation, that gives you a feeling that she's going somewhere, and she knows where that is," said Jesse Cohen, who along with Wysocki, created [ARTDC.org](#). "This is a unique quality that makes the world pay attention."

The materials she uses are just as non-traditional as her artwork. While most artists stick with one medium, Wysocki is known to use acrylic, spray paint, and charcoal in one piece.

"I'm a really big supporter of drawing vs. painting. People always give such heavy weight to a painting and I always wanted to blur those lines," Wysocki said. "The mixed media aspect is a lot of play and trying to understand if things really bind together or separate."

Wysocki continued her non-traditional route in 1998 when she began experimenting with paper, instead of the oft-preferred canvas.

"The first serious move onto paper was to play with absorption rates with different materials," she said. "There was a bit of psychology in play as well around canvas being so permanent and paper easily disposed. I was able to freely play and not feel so constrained."



For her international shows next spring, Wysocki will "push the process even more," with heavy texture and more defined imagery and text. Her intention is to create a pull between chance and control, with the more detailed brushwork images playing against the texture of the background.

Before establishing herself in New York four years ago, Wysocki was a traveling artist of sorts. After high school, Wysocki spent two years at the [Maryland Institute College of Art](#) in Baltimore, and then took time off to work for Versace and get a business degree from [Marymount University](#). By 1998 she decided it was time to follow her dream to San Francisco. She earned a BFA from the [San Francisco Art Institute](#) in 2000.

At each location, she became involved in the local art education from being a visiting artist at a Baltimore elementary school to assisting in public art pieces in San Francisco. However, it was her three-year stint as a special education teacher in a

psychiatry facility in D.C. that stuck with her.

"I think they had been so startled to have the freedom to express themselves," Wysocki said. "Whether through painting outside or sculpting, it was about getting the tools to them and letting them play."

Wysocki, who grew up in a suburb of D.C., at first found it was a shock for her to work with kids who grew up in poverty and spent time in gangs. She soon learned though, "In the end kids are kids." For the youth, art offered them a chance to express themselves and to heal. For Wysocki, the kids inspired her to introduce new themes into her work.

"They can work as muses to a point," she said. "Being able to put that emotion and heaviness into my work worked for me as well."

Her time as a teacher wasn't the only thing that struck a chord with Wysocki in D.C. The art scene, or lack thereof, continued to bother her until one night, she put a post on Craigslist, calling the artists of D.C. to come together and create an art movement that recognized the local art community.

After meeting with a handful of artists over coffee one day, ARTDC.org was born. The site is a network for artists to create projects and connect with other artists, galleries and collectors. Today ARTDC has a studio project in D.C. and a gallery in Maryland. Cohen said Wysocki was essential to the success of ARTDC.

"Beyond her top-notch work that speaks for itself, she has a keen business sense, as you can see from the success of her art and business management projects outside of art," Cohen said.

Wysocki's path to being a professional artist was different from most, but she urges anyone with the art bug to go for it. "I think that being a professional artist is a very difficult job and it's a constant struggle," Wysocki said. "But if you can do it, go for it."