

As a scientist, Pam Sukthum painted in secret. Only remnants of paint on her hands and clothes after oddly timed lunch breaks revealed her hidden trade. She was literally a closeted artist; her first studio was a walk-in closet in her apartment.

Coming from a traditionally medical family, Sukthum worked for a medical device company as a researcher (and also studied psychology in graduate school) before picking up a paintbrush on a whim.

Eventually, Sukthum hung up her lab coat and donned a painter's smock in 2001. In February, she moved into her studio, Infinite Vision Art, 1624 Hammond Pl., Ste. 224 (above Café Lurca) and isn't looking back.

With her works selling for \$600-\$9,500 apiece and countless possibilities on the rise, she's out to debunk the starving artist myth. "Creating art has informed my entire life. I have learned to trust more, to let go and live more passionately," she said.

Bearing thick globs of pastel paint on big brushes, the energetic, apron-clad 38-year-old alternated between sitting and standing as she painted a 4-by-6-foot canvas—the largest that nearby art supply store, Utrecht, 1601 Hennepin Ave. S., carries.

Wearing a T-shirt and flip-flops, Sukthum listened to the same songs repeatedly while painting works for her "Eviscerated" series. She listened to Evanescence's eponymous "My Immortal" (about wounds that won't heal—160 times in five days) according to her iPod while creating one "Eviscerated" piece. Sukthum thinks this tendency may show in her work.

"I work in layers, going over the same canvas with different coats of paint over and over. There's also a lot of repetition just in the strokes themselves. The music helps elicit movement. It feels like dancing on the canvas," she said. Her words spill poetry: her fascination with biology. "I'd Peanut" snidely depicts a fetus and her "Eviscerated" series is about extracting innards (in a designed way, not in reality).

"It's about maintaining a balance. This is how the two morph together. I can't really escape my interests," she said. "The paint practically vibrates off the canvas," said Laura Shaw, who owns Body Insight, 310 Grovehand, which has purchased Sukthum works. "When I look at her artwork, what impresses me most is her ability to paint energy. She's becoming more and more present. It's very powerful."

Sukthum has already gained notoriety in galleries in Santa Fe, New York, Florida and Minnesota. Crossroads

Contemporary Art Gallery in Santa Fe and a California printmaking publisher with a cutting-edge "topographical" magazine represent her. She also brushed a mural in Mazatlan, Mexico and landed the cover of the magazine, "Sublimetia."



'Eviscerated XV - Surfacing'

These curious about the prints and Sukthum's work are invited to an opening reception at Infinite Vision Studio, Sunday, July 25. There'll also be live music.

DJs and appetizers, in collaboration with New World Productions, for details, e-mail pam@infinitevisionart.com or visit www.infinitevisionart.com.

Infinite Vision Studio

The smell of still-drying oil paints and varnish permeate Sukthum's expansive studio in the historic Fawkes building. It's fully equipped with display cases, kitchen and a bathroom, plus creative gizmos such as Sukthum's beloved arcade diego game Zaxxon, signage rescued from a German tavern, theater seats, a disco ball, plastic wind-up toys, flowers, a vanity mirror and a diorama of a mouse family Christmas (through a miniature door in the wall).

"The space just lends itself to ideas and productivity. You can do anything in here. There's a lot of room," Sukthum said.

Finished canvases line the white walls, and others, clamped into easels, wait for final touches. Right now, Sukthum is finishing up her "Eviscerated" series. Her cardiovascular background is turned inside out as thick, textured veins and blood vessels unwind and spill out.

First, she coats the canvas with a thick, finger-painted layer that forms the underbelly of her vital works. She builds up a tension-infused, heavy surface. She takes a deep breath and then builds up layers of muscular paint. Searching internally (hence the series title), she discovers a radiant, emotional frontier: played in blushing cadmium orange, coals loosen and overlie.

Her "Unmasked" pieces unravel Sukthum's true identity even more. Developing as a painter, she discovered layers she didn't know she had. She shed former expectations for

her emotional and professional life. Lots of faces, open and closed eyes — all suspended atop thin stems/icks, steeped in thought — are bound together by bands of color as the artist revisits a psychological quest (she attended graduate school in psychology) for self-awareness and happiness.

Sukthum's longtime friend, Mark Scholins, a Downtown business consultant whose home office is above Ellis, 1225 Hennepin Ave. S., bought a print from this series. "Like the repetition in it, it resonates but doesn't grow tiresome. It sticks in your head, like a song. More so than 'The Macarena,'" he said.

'Where Art and Commerce Meet'

Sukthum isn't always so serious. As "Sam Pookin" she paints humorist "Fish and Bugs" characters, creepy-crawlies slinking through seaweed and forest mats. Yet, even in this cartoony series, she draws from personal experience. The creatures were modeled after species she observed while scuba diving in Thailand and elsewhere, reflecting Sukthum's background as a first-generation Thai-American.

Sukthum's licensing agent, Sue Primavera is working to bring "Fish and Bugs" to any number of products — plates and cups, animated movies and children's books — and other Sukthum projects. Sukthum has ambitious business plans. "I'm on a quest to debunk the starving artist myth. . . . I see the artwork as a connection to myself and the business as my connection to the world."

Primavera is confident. "I can foresee quite a few things for [Sukthum] in the not-too-distant future. I think she'll be very busy and explode into the marketplace. She could be on everything from hospital scrubs to animated cartoons." Sukthum eagerly awaits the release of her Toccara prints later this month. The Toccara print process lays down as many as 14 layers of archival inks on a metal sheet, examining every square inch of the work, they build up layers of pigment to imitate the surface of the painting. "Toccara" is Italian for "to touch."

Larry Longobardi from the California-based Renaissance Art Group handpicked Sukthum as the first artist for his cutting-edge technology. Sukthum said Longobardi told her at a New York Art Expo that her textured, almost relief map-like paintings would perfectly exemplify his innovative printmaking technique.

Sukthum said the cutting-edge reproductions stir curiosity. She carried a sample Toccara print into a restaurant and "people kept coming over to touch it," she said.