

ESSAY'D #8: Rose E. DeSloover

[originally published *Essay'd*: November, 2014]

Though the vows taken by Rose E. DeSloover when she became a nun were dissolved when she left the convent 14 years later, to more freely pursue the art practice that had become her higher calling, there remains a thread of both religion and faith that runs throughout a number of her signature bodies of work.

Most literally dealing with religion is DeSloover's *mail art series*, *Sacred Moments in the News*, an ongoing process comprised of found news items—specifically related to religion in some way—converted to postcards and sent out in signed editions to a mailing list that has grown to a couple of hundred recipients, both acquaintances and strangers. Another work, *Cinderella's Shoes [Art in Fact #3] (1997/2008)* utilizes three pairs of satin liturgical shoes bought by DeSloover from a white elephant sale at the Verona Father's Mission in Monroe, Michigan. DeSloover notes the “most significant” fact that these shoes, which had belonged to the bishop who confirmed her, fit her feet. With its religious subject matter and careful denotation of synchronicity, this marks a transition toward a kind of universal faith or belief in a larger picture, away from a specific religious order such as the one that DeSloover worked within for so many years.

This display also employs two of the most prevalent mechanisms within DeSloover's work: strict use of found objects (the determination to create no new pieces was made by DeSloover during her church-subsidized stint in graduate school), and a fascination with what she terms the “domestication of color.” DeSloover's obsession with house paint as a medium contains both an aesthetic and a literary interest. Fostered early by her own name—Rosemary—amplified by red cheeks and red hair, and reinforced by her initials, RED (synchronicity everywhere!), DeSloover began to experiment in grad school with portraiture and composition that utilized the kind of paint-color charts that are readily available at any hardware store. As is obvious in her *Self-Portrait*, DeSloover, is drawn to identify with colors and their

names, extrapolating layers of meaning from her ready-made palette—the choice to limit herself to pre-existing colors was an important subset of DeSloover’s discipline around found objects. This practice has further evolved to include found objects paired with color/names as a form of portraiture, as in her work *Run Around Sue*, a portrait of friend and performance artist Sue Carman Vian.

From here, colors and their attendant meanings have generated several significant arcs in DeSloover’s work. “Kryptonite”—a neon green that was first adopted in her portrait of her teacher and major influence, light artist James Turrell—has become a signifier of protective energy, which DeSloover employed in her piece *Protecting Paris*, a collaboration with poet _____, and even in her daily wardrobe, depending on her need for protection against influential or threatening forces. Kryptonite, in DeSloover’s world, is the single weakness of Superman (a persona that she had lovingly attached to Turrell, due to his charisma and force of personality), but she is quick to mention that she really thinks of the ‘Superman’ more in the Nietzschean sense. This is only one of DeSloover’s interactions with canonical philosophers; in 2002 she participated in an intensive six-week seminar on the unfinished *Arcades Project (Passagenwerk)* by Walter Benjamin, which DeSloover describes as opening a cracked door to find an entire warehouse of kinship and an inspirational wellspring that continues to inform her practice today.

Indeed, much like the *Arcades Project*, DeSloover’s decades of work—both as a conceptual artist and as an educator/administrator for 44 years at Marygrove College in Detroit—defy easy analysis, and perhaps benefit more from a process not unlike one that DeSloover herself might employ: a careful collecting of artifacts and evidence, a conscious noting of seeming synchronicity, and an overwhelming sense that these elements coalesce into a bigger picture, perhaps slightly beyond our vantage point.