

# Artspace

## IN THE STUDIO WITH ARTIST ROXA SMITH & HER COLORFUL INTERIORS

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Roxa Smith. Photo courtesy of the artist

The Venezuelan-born, New York-based artist Roxa Smith depicts interior spaces as if they were portraits—teeming with personality and life. They're also carefully rendered formal investigations; skewed perspectives, flattened pectoral space, and the use of windows and mirrors make some of Smith's images teeter on the abstract. Here, the artist shares images of her studio and her process, and speaks with us about her ever-evolving painting and collage practice.



Roxa Smith's studio. Image courtesy of the artist.

**What is it about interiors that interests you?**

My love for interiors started when I moved to New York in 1991. I originally started as a landscape painter in California. When I moved to New York it was a very dark and gray city—very different than it is today. I had also seen the Matisse show at the National Gallery in Washington. Somehow that really inspired me. And the third thing that happened to me was that I visited my grandmother's old farm house in upstate New York; it had beautiful rooms that looked like museum rooms. I went up there to paint landscapes but it rained the entire time I was there. So those three things put together made me start painting interiors. I've gone through a lot of different scenes, I've used animals in interiors, I've done miniature interiors, I've explored other subject matter but somehow interiors always capture my imagination and my heart. It's led me to a lot of different approaches. I still have a love for landscape but it's interiors that are my anchor.

**Do you typically paint rooms you know and inhabit; do you paint from life? Or are your images constructed from your imagination or from source material?**

In the beginning I was working primarily from life, not taking photos. The domestic interiors are mostly places I've experienced first-hand. As my process has evolved, I now do sketches and I also take photos. I use the photos and the drawings and I take from other places and other objects, and I put them into the interiors. So recently, the interiors don't necessarily end up being completely faithful reproductions of the spaces; in fact, a lot of them are sort of collages of places. They're based on a place but then they're transformed and translated. But there's a spirit that makes me want to work from a particular architectural framework and from there I will start shifting until I find that the space really sings for me.



Roxa Smith's collages inside her studio. Image courtesy of the artist.

**You began with painting but more recently you've also been working in collage. The collages use patterns, and they seem flatter and less three-dimensional than your paintings, which are more straight-forward in their representation of space. Can you speak to these different approaches?**

Both my paintings and my collages reconsider spatial values, but they're different processes. The collages are all either of rooms or based on chairs and patterns and shadows. I spend a lot of time choosing the patterned paper; that becomes my pallet. There are fewer elements to work from when I'm doing collage, so therefore they're more graphic in nature and they have different kinds of subtleties than the paintings do. With the paintings I can work on more detail and travel throughout the spaces. And some of the collages actually come from paintings I have made, they're just different interpretations—like a person who writes a novel versus a short story. To someone who's just looking at the work quickly, the collages look a bit more abstract, in a way, because the paintings have more rendering in them. The collages are newer for me; they're more like constructions. My most recent interiors have a lot of collaged elements, you just can't really tell. But in both cases—with the collages and with the paintings—I'm getting inspiration from the domestic interiors or spaces or objects that I come in contact with in my daily life.

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