



At first glimpse, the vibrant artworks of **Sarah-Jane Szikora's** humorous paintings may appear just that - a jolly, entertaining snapshot of the human condition. However, the artist is quick to point out whilst some of her subject matter may appear to be lighthearted slapstick, there is a much deeper vein running through her body of work

# My life on canvas



**F**ood, relationships and humour are key elements to the success of Sarah-Jane Szikora's paintings. The larger than life characters in her work have a familiarity, or a story to tell, which will usually bring a knowing smile or even a full-blown belly laugh from onlookers.

Born in County Durham in 1971, Szikora completed a foundation course at Harrogate College of Art before going on to study illustration at Cleveland College of Art. It was here that a tutor's comment, "If you're going to exaggerate, you have to really exaggerate!" proved to be her biggest influence.

By describing her style as "sherbert fountainism", Szikora's own sense of humour is as evident as the humour in her paintings. She uses many of her own experiences for inspiration, frivolous moments such as finding yesterdays knickers falling out of trousers worn for a second day, to subjects more macabre that she simply can't place.

"Life is difficult", says Szikora. "The world is full of problems, and then we die. If these facts didn't find their way into work that is entirely centred on the observation of people, there would be something missing. Occasionally I look at a finished piece and think 'Where did that one come

#### **Chocolate Spread**

Giclée edition 295

Image 12" x 18"

 £211  £295

#### **Infatuation - The Book**

Standard open edition £29.95

Limited Edition of 995 in Boxed Set including limited edition print £95





Sarah-Jane Szikora's new exhibition 'Infatuations' is currently touring galleries in the UK

from?! Who will want to hang that on their wall?' But to my constant delight, the collectors seem to 'get it'. The wicked devil and old lady are a good example", she says. "I met a couple in a gallery recently and the gentleman had suffered a heart attack so they bought the image to serve as a reminder - take nothing for granted, tomorrow we may be gone."

A recurring theme in Szikora's work is food, a subject she takes seriously. "Food is an emotional issue for all of us. Whether we have enough, too little or too much. We use it to reward ourselves, or withhold it as punishment. It brings people together and ulti-

mately determines how healthy we are in every sense", says Szikora. "So already I have a mountain of potential material... but on a visual level, food, sweet food in particular, attracts our attention; it seduces us with its pink icing, myriad texture and pretty rainbow colours. What better visual subject matter for an artist like myself?"

**The larger than life characters in her work have a familiarity, or a story to tell, which will usually bring a knowing smile or even a full-blown belly laugh from onlookers**

With such saccharine-sweet subject matters, Szikora's work could be overly cute, however her paintings have a darker edge that stem, in part, from her social awareness. "Sometimes I am responding to social issues", says Szikora. "For example, much of my work has focused on turning around the negative relationship that women, in particular, have with their bodies, thanks to the media presenting perfect airbrushed models for us to live up to."

Can anything of Szikora's own life be found in her paintings? She claims not. "It is worth pointing out that I am neither over or underweight, don't know any live gingerbread men, and I tend not to keep miniature-sized men in my knicker drawer", says Szikora. "These figures are simply the tools, a mechanism to communicate a feeling. Whatever the main character, angels or devils, it all represents our very human behaviour. When I decide to paint my idea of hell, it's possibly because I've recently been trapped in a miserable, crowded train carriage or I may have met someone who was particularly fascinating or disagreeable or wearing a funny beard. But often, I don't realise myself until some time after a painting is finished where the original idea was born. It's a subconscious process", she says. "For example, 'Girl with a Broken Heart' is easy to explain [E]



**Good Enough to Eat**  
Giclée edition 295  
Image 8" x 5½"  
m]£117 f]£175



- I had painted her, without acknowledgement that she had been created as a direct result of my own romantic failure. 'Field, Homage to Anthony Gormley' from the latest releases, was my way of paying tribute to a great artist, but also wondering how curators of long term or permanent collections pass their time, where do their thoughts take them day in, day out?"

'Sweet food in particular, attracts our attention. It seduces us with its pink icing, myriad texture and pretty rainbow colours. What better visual subject matter for an artist like myself?'

Initially Szikora thought her work might be more popular with women rather than men, however her one-woman exhibition, currently touring the UK, has enabled her to meet her collectors and has changed her mind. "I had thought for a long time that my collectors might be predominantly female, but this tour and my last exhibition has shown a fairly equal divide", says Szikora. "It is a delight and a relief to me that the sight of those poor chaps in their y-fronts doesn't seem to have alienated the boys too much."



**Ace**  
Giclée edition 295  
Image 16" x 10½"  
m]£176 f]£250



**Ginger Nuts**  
Giclée edition 295  
Image 12¼" x 20"  
m]£211 f]£295

Meeting her audience has also provided inspiration for future paintings. "It is interesting to meet the collectors who live with the art. They are a smashing bunch, especially when they come along with amusing tales of 'knitted yellow suits' and 'skinny men and mangles'", says Szikora. If asked to explain what she means, Szikora replies, "Don't ask, just watch this space!" A request that is sure to produce a ripple of anticipation amongst Szikora's ever growing fan-base. ■

For more information  
[www.washingtongreen.co.uk](http://www.washingtongreen.co.uk)