

ES MUCHO

SOFIA ENRIQUEZ IS FUSING ART AND FASHION IN A LANE THAT'S ALL HER OWN.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY **LANCE GERBER**

Walk into Sofia Enriquez's Palm Springs apartment, and paint is the first thing you notice. It's on the walls, on the floor, on the dress that reads "FEA" and hangs on a beige mannequin near the window. ("It's OK to be ugly," Enriquez says of the piece.) Art supplies pour out of crates that nearly reach the ceiling, for her job with the YMCA's After School Education and Safety program where she teaches elementary and middle school students about art. In the opposite corner, a nearly finished painting tops a sheet hung on the wall, next to a rack of vintage clothes covered in her signature symbols.

Some know Enriquez as a muralist. Her piece, "Empowerment of Women," on the side of Taqueria Arandas in Coachella features swirling paisley patterns and an array of female faces. Others know her as a teacher. In addition to her work with ASES, she brings lunchtime craft tables to girls at local middle schools through the Palm Springs Unified School District's Lady Lead program, helps out with art shows and events for The Coachella Valley Art Scene and previously worked as an art educator for the Palm Springs Art Museum. Now an art handler at Heather James Fine Art, she took on an entirely different role in the public eye this spring: designer. She hosted her first fashion show featuring her clothing line, "Es Mucho," in Palm Desert this March.

"[They're] not that chill to wear," Enriquez says of her clothes, which are hand-painted for the eclectically inclined. Even neutral jackets or faded denim take on a bold vibrancy beneath her brush – a scroll through her Depop shop (@sofiaenri) shows red swim trunks featuring a nude woman; a light blue airline security guard uniform with the phrase, "Open for the meantime"; and an '80s lime green dress painted with steak, eggs and a daisy.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Giselle Urbina, Zeus Lee,
Sofia Enriquez and Nia Yates.
Styling by Patrick Michael Lopaze

Her vintage pieces are like wearable versions of her murals and paintings, all of which are far from precious. They're provocative. They're powerful. The same paisley shapes and female faces (she's inspired by and drawn to the human eye) are often found across all of her mediums. If she does depict a body, it's usually naked. Otherwise, most busts cut off at the neck. The faces are homogenous, devoid of gender or race. She says she took to painting them that way after numerous instances of "older men" asking her "What are you?" while she was working.

"I always just look at them confused and say, 'I'm a woman,'" explains the Otis College of Art and Design graduate.

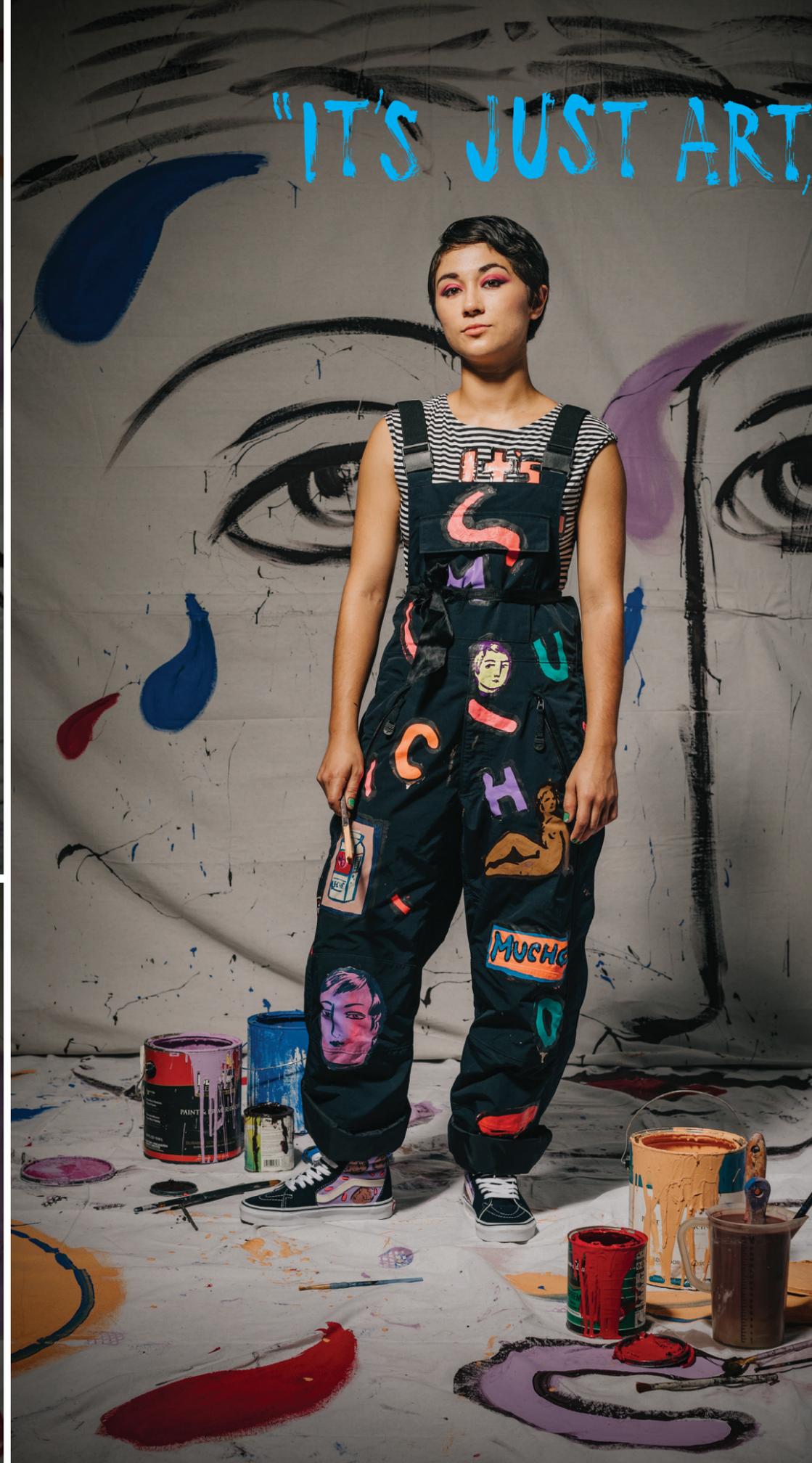
"The characters I paint, you can't really tell what they are," Enriquez says. "That's the point. Why does it matter what they are? Just enjoy it. Just enjoy the person. Enjoy the look. Enjoy the colors."

So, is this a call for a post-racial society? "No, not at all," she answers. "I don't think being colorblind exists. I think that's kind of ignorant to say. I just think I try to be a good person and I acknowledge that I'm Mexican American. I'm very stoked to be it because I can speak Spanish and English. But, you know, it's not anything different from a lot of people I know. It's a common thing. Everyone's mixed. Everyone! Everyone I know is mixed. I've never met anyone that's like, 'I'm only this.' No! You're not. You're trippin'. You're everything."

"I have femininity and masculinity in my personality," Enriquez adds. "Sometimes, I'm more California. Sometimes, I'm more Mexico City."



"IT'S JUST ART, DUDE."



If Enriquez were a dichotomy, it would be this: endearingly intimidating. Her art is loud, her language bold – yet, her open-mindedness and sense of humor are strikingly inviting. She often paints her brand name, Es Mucho, on her paintings and her clothing. It stems from a conversation with her mother, who became increasingly concerned with how much her daughter was working.

"Mija, no hagas mucho. Es mucho," Enriquez recalls her mother saying.

Enriquez's response? "Well, if I take it easy, then I'm not going to accomplish anything."

With Es Mucho, she's "making fun of the fact that working hard is just overwhelming, but it's really the only way we can survive." It's at once homage to and critique of the burn-out she's learned to cope with – and embrace – if it means she's making more art. When she has time, she'll try to make one clothing piece per day, not to mention her paintings, private commissions, two jobs and volunteer work. "Teaching art is the only way I can make a living off of making art," she says. "That's just the way it is."

Ultimately, her dream is to become a street artist. It's the "only way" she is "going to be able to travel and share art." In the meantime, she's not worried about making money off her paintings. Neither those nor the clothes pay her bills. "I'm not really looking to please the people that have all that money," she explains. "I don't care if it's worth a lot right now [or] worth a lot later, as long as I'm making it and it's fun and I like it."

So she'll continue to create to the beat of her own drum, free of the waiting game and free of the pressure. In fact, she's been leaving her paintings at random locations around the Coachella Valley for free. She'll drive to a gas station, set a work on the pump, then post about its whereabouts on Instagram to alert nearby passersby.

If you find one, take it. Or, don't.

As Enriquez would say: "It's just art, dude." 🍌