

Sweet Success

With the help of an edible medium and a generous mentor, an artist tastes international fame.

It's going to be a whirlwind few days for artist Sid Chidiac. He just arrived in Hollywood to prepare for a show at NoHo Gallery LA. The exhibition organizers expect 75,000 people—up from the 40,000 who attended last year—and Chidiac may be asked to paint California's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger. First things first, though: Chidiac needs to repaint a portrait of Marilyn Monroe that was damaged on his flight from New York. It crumbled and the artist ate it.

The 36-year-old's principle medium is pure Belgian chocolate and his paintings are entirely edible, frame and all. Over the last three years, Chidiac's portraits of celebrity and government personalities have attracted vast media

attention, as well as a sponsor. International chocolate company Barry Callebaut keeps Chidiac in an endless supply of rich white, milk and dark chocolates that he can combine with food colorings to get his desired hues.

As for his technique: "I keep the chocolate just a bit warm," he says, "and that's it. I work with only one brush. To clean it, I lick the chocolate before using the next color."

Chidiac shows at chocolate fairs all over the world, and the paintings' allure is such that he has to post signs requesting patrons not eat the artworks or sample his paint. "People love chocolate, he says. "When they see my paintings, they want to touch and taste."

Though Chidiac's unusual paintings are attracting big media attention now, when he first came to New York from his home in Sydney, Australia, people told the struggling artist he was no Michelangelo. The young oil painter had experienced some success in group and solo shows in Sydney, but had yet to break the Manhattan art scene when he met Anita Durst, founder of the Chashama organization, a non-profit group dedicated to promoting emerging artists. Durst liked Chidiac's work and offered him space to work in a storefront on 42nd Street in Times Square.

"When a child is born," says Chidiac, "he needs his mother for nourishment. An artist is like that—he needs a mother. Anita has been a mother to so many. She let me stay in the window and work on a huge painting of the *Last Supper* for two weeks. Four thousand people per hour pass by that window in New York and there they were, looking at my painting."



Currently, Chidiac's works appear in collections around the world—the United States, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Australia. Though he continues to paint in oils as well, Chidiac says he's reached a point where chocolate is his natural medium. "When you learn a language, you get to a stage where you can speak the language and it comes easily—that's how it is. Painting in chocolate is easier than painting in oils now."

Each chocolate portrait takes Chidiac less than two days to complete and can last many years if kept in the right conditions, away from heat and humidity. Though Marilyn Monroe became an in-flight snack, most of the chocolate portraits are auctioned for thousands of dollars to raise money for child cancer patients. "It's never enough," says Chidiac of his charity work, "but it's giving something back."

Chidiac will be exhibiting at the Metropolitan Pavilion in New York November 10-13 and at the Salon du Chocolat in Paris October 22-25. His work can be seen at www.sidchidiac.com. For more information on Chashama's upcoming programs, visit www.chashama.org.

Unlikely art

Though Sid Chidiac's painting *Yvonne and Joshua* (15x15) was created entirely of pure Belgian chocolate, it will last years if stored away from heat and humidity.

