

VOICES FROM THE CITIES

Robyne Robinson

Owner and curator, Flatland Gallery, Minneapolis



Robyne Robinson's passion is advocating the work of local artists.

By Marcia Jedd

“I’VE ALWAYS WANTED to own my own art gallery. With all the resources here in Minneapolis, I said to myself, the best time to do it is now,” says Robyne Robinson of her decision a couple of years ago to open the Flatland Gallery in Minneapolis. Robinson also serves on the Basilica’s Arts Advisory Committee and arts boards for the Walker Art Center and Independent Feature Project Minneapolis. She maintains a high profile as a full-time news anchor and reporter at KMSB television, a position she’s held since 1990. At KMSB, she produces the evening entertainment news program, “The Buzz.” Robinson is single and lives in the Kenwood area of Minneapolis. Raised Catholic in Chicago, she earned a bachelor’s degree in communications and journalism at Loyola University. Contributor Marcia Jedd interviewed Robinson at the Flatland Gallery.

I understand your family has strong roots in the arts. How did your interest in art and starting Flatland come about?

I’ve always been interested in the visual arts but was dissuaded by my parents from going into it as a career. They didn’t want to see me struggle, so I picked journalism. And fortunately, just being able to do “The Buzz” has put me in touch with many people from the arts community. A few years ago, I started curating shows at the Lounge nightclub in Minneapolis. Finally, I decided it was time for me to get my own place. It was really kind of a frightening, overwhelming thing to think about. The business end of it probably dissuaded me the most because the failure rate for new galleries is high. Most galleries have a life span of about two years.

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How has the process of facing your fears to take that leap of faith in opening the gallery changed you?

I was really excited and nervous and scared. At first I couldn’t stand working in here by myself because I was alone. Now, it’s so comforting because I’m allowed to think a lot — not about just business but about things I want to do and need to do for fulfillment. This allowed me to think more broadly about what I want out of life, this business and our community. I’m constantly thinking about marketing, publicity. It is hard work to get your name out there, investing in the business and looking for artists that will make the connection with the community so that it takes off.

How would you describe your purpose in showcasing the talents of local and regional artists at Flatland?

The gallery is doing what it’s supposed to do, which is to provide a home for emerging artists, to make a bridge with the community that is very arts-supported and very arts-literate but oftentimes is very leery of going to places that are unfamiliar. Galleries tend to isolate people and make them feel as if they can’t come in. We’re trying to educate the community about the artists we have here, not necessarily buy into the belief that anything you buy should have a big name and big price tag.

From a spiritual perspective, what have you learned from working with artists?

You are allowing people to express themselves. Artists are truly blessed because they are able to communicate in a different way. They’re able to express God’s grace through their work. Everything they do is spiritual. Artists are spiritual people. What comes from them is divine inspiration. If you are lucky enough to be able to interpret that and deliver that message to other people, then you are successful. That’s what I am capable of doing, and that’s how I see my faith working.

So you would you call it a success so far?

I feel it’s very much of a success. I’m happy and very proud. We’ve accomplished our goals with what we wanted to do with emerging artists in the community, which is to give them a place to start out to prepare for another level in their career. Some are already established and need another shot in the arm or are looking for a gallery experience.

Where does your own faith fit into your love of art and the gallery business?

I come from a family that really believes in giving back, and I’m lucky enough to come from people that have a strong faith. Coming from the south side of Chicago, technically, I should be a statistic (as) an African-American woman. So I’m lucky enough to benefit from people who made great sacrifices. I know that I have to give back. That’s nothing special; that’s a human quality.

Tell me more about your everyday faith, whether attending church, prayer or in day-to-day living.

Do I go to church every Sunday? No, I do not. I don’t think I need to be at church every Sunday to experience the power of God in my life. I experience it every day by what I do. (Laughter). Sorry, Father O’Connell! I’m very sorry. I am a good Catholic. Your spirituality comes in your day-to-day life in how you treat other people, how you help other people. Really taking in the world around you and knowing that it’s a good day — you got up. The gallery is very meditative for me. It makes

me think about who I am and what more I can do and who I am completely. That’s where my faith and spirituality come into what I do on a daily basis. It is a deeper realm, which I think is what the church wants us to achieve.

Finally, any comments on how you handle your work between the gallery and your news anchor role?

In the newsroom, you’ve got at the most four hours to go out and turn the story around and get it back, get it edited in time to make the deadline. So you don’t care about other people sometimes. But this place has brought me out of that. I’ve always tried to be cognizant of that, but it’s in a bigger way now, much bigger. I try to keep the two worlds separate, actually, because it keeps life a lot saner. If anything, it makes the personal side of the professional business much better.

Marcia Jedd, www.marciajedd.com, is a Minneapolis-based writer and marketing researcher. She writes on a variety of topics, including relationships as a contributor to the “Single Life” column in the Star Tribune.

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