

Robert Robinson

Robert Robinson was born in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1953. Growing up in the '50s in Middle America, the third of four children, Robinson's life mimicked a Norman Rockwell painting in many ways. Church on Sundays followed by a big dinner at Grandma's house, "fighting" with his brothers and a solid sense of family and self, instilled by the deep love his parents felt for their children, was the norm for his family.

Early on in life, Robinson knew he wanted to be an artist. While his parents may have preferred that their young son consider careers that were guaranteed to be more lucrative, they did not attempt to dissuade him from his passion. By age seven, Robinson had found a mentor who taught him oil painting plus technique, and he started painting rural landscapes, which he was told were quite complex for his age.

Still hanging in his mother's home is a painting of a seascape that Robinson created after he and his brother were punished for fighting and subsequently sent to their rooms. Instead of ruminating, Robinson picked up his paintbrush and began to paint. Young as he was, he realized that being alone was not a punishment for him; rather, he enjoyed being allowed to become completely absorbed in his art by the solitude, almost becoming part of the paint. That feeling has never left him.

High school was filled with baseball, basketball and girls, but art still attracted him most of all. He had a wonderful art teacher who introduced him to imaging outside of realism, and that opened a mental door for him. With his instructor helping him learn other techniques such as semi-representational, Robinson spent as much time as possible in art class honing his craft. During his senior year, Robinson entered a regional, juried show and won, whereby he was entered in the New York Scholastic Art Show. He painted a landscape in oils in a monochromatic abstraction style and won again. He says that hearing the principal read his name and award over the loud speaker, in a school that was very large and very competitive, was extremely rewarding and further validation of his decision to follow art.

Because he was so impressed with his high school art teacher, Robinson planned to become a teacher, and after high school graduation he enrolled in Einkorn State College in Einkorn, Pennsylvania. He majored in painting because it would allow him access to work in every medium including sculpture, fabric design, printmaking and drawing. Everything seemed to be right on track when suddenly tragedy struck his family. One of his siblings was diagnosed with a long-term, serious illness, and the support he had always enjoyed from his parents lessened considerably because

they had to be almost totally focused on his brother. Family life was never the same again, and Robinson struggled to adjust to the new reality.

During his last semester of college, Robinson embarked on student teaching where he spent the semester teaching art and soon felt it meant little more than tutoring students in crafts. Hugely disappointed, Robinson came to the realization that he didn't want to teach. Having worked very hard to reach the point where he was in art, he did not want to spend his life bringing art back to its simplest form. Instead, he wanted to continue to reach new heights and grow in the field he loved so much. Difficult as his last semester was, it also held a high point that occurred when one of his professors recommended both Robinson and another friend be allowed to have a two-person show at the Bates Gallery on campus. It was very reaffirming that he was going in the right direction.

He graduated in 1975 with a B.S. in art education. Graduation was a confusing period in his life as his longtime planned teaching career was no longer what he wanted to do. Robinson found a job with a designer painting city scenes in McDonald's restaurants. He painted local, visual architectural landmarks on the walls. Intermittent work and low pay caused him to seek additional employment, and he began working with his brother as a carpenter and home builder. In the process, he learned to use all kinds of tools which he would later use in creating his artwork.

When soaring interest rates caused the home-building business to decline considerably, Robinson made the decision to go back into art fulltime. Showing his portfolio, he made a large impression on a museum curator. The curator insisted on coming to see Robinson's studio only to discover that the "starving artist" was painting in the hallway of his apartment building. By the following year, Robinson was receiving acclaim from the art community for his unusual and aggressive artwork. He continued to receive accolades and more awards, but because the marketplace was relatively small, he was still not making the income he needed. Through a friend, Robinson began his association with RFA Decor, and his work is now marketed all over the world. It is a very refreshing experience for him. He is very pleased that RFA Decor is open to experimentation and is very happy and content.

Robinson's art is known for its high energy and mixed-media abstraction. The image is secondary to Robert; rather, he manipulates the medium and that is the part of art that intrigues him. Painting is a very physical thing for him as he typically paints quite large spaces, including installation art. *Red Haired Girl*, *Incident* and *Souvenir*, which was purchased by the Carnegie Museum, are some of his best-known works. Currently painting on tar paper, the black scratch lines he creates are framed with difficult-to-design and labor-intensive carbon steel frames. The result is

an elegant, symbiotic relationship between the two media and a powerful, while at the same time, delicate art form.

Consumed as he is with his art, Robinson also enjoys spending time with his two sons. Both boys are very artistic, and Robinson revels in watching both of them grow in their artistic endeavors. Bonsai gardening is another favorite pastime. And, as he continues to search for new expression in his artistry, Robinson probably has surprised himself by the fulfillment he has found teaching art to adults at the university level.