

Tommy Robinson's Exhibits Attract "Large Crowds"

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

He's one of Charlotte's most successful artists. His works command prices of \$5,000 or more, and no one makes a fuss about paying for them. His showings always attract large crowds. Prominent Charlotte physicians were the first major collectors of his art, though, they now must compete with major corporations such as NCNB for the prized pictures. He has toured the entire Southeast and Europe.

But Tommy Robinson, pretty much remains unaffected by it all. People who know him say he's quiet and serious then at times funny and boisterous. "He's good people," T.J. Reddy, owner of Ready Art Shoppe, describes. But for many people who do not know him well, he remains an enigma.

That's alright with Robinson. He doesn't bother with making much of a personal impression on people. He's more concerned with the impressions he presents through his art.

"I am a realist," he announces specifying his type of work. His most popular pictures are of people, many who live in the Charlotte area, children, adults, and elderly people. "Realism is the most difficult art form. It doesn't allow for any mistakes," he explains.

"Plus people relate to it better. Realistic portraits don't require the artist stands there and explain what he was trying to show. People should feel something from an artist's picture. They shouldn't have to ask, 'What is it?' 'Is it art or is it crap?'" Robinson points out.

He works in a studio in the downtown area where this interview took place.

The studio is large and airy with windows lining one wall letting in plenty of light. Robinson's drawing table is placed in front of the windows. He is currently working on a sketch of Margaret Freeman, a Charlotte-based actress and director. Though the picture is two-dimensional, the subjects, Freeman and a young boy, appear very lifelike; the essence of all Robinson's pictures.

Throughout the room are easels, palettes and sheet-shrouded finished paintings, some as large as five feet high. Most of these intensely colorful paintings are from a new series Robinson is working on. "I'm getting into surrealism," he informs.

Robinson is lucky, he has reached the pinnacle of achievement in his hometown. This means, unlike many other visual artists, he can sustain himself financially on his artwork alone.

He says, "I've been an artist for twelve years. It's a part of me I can't help from doing. I done other things but I've always come back to art. This is what I'm suppose to do."

"But there is a lot of talent (artistic) in North Carolina," he continues. "Unfortunately, the state hasn't utilized its black talent. In fact it's oppressed it and several people with ability have had to leave."

"I don't think a person should have to leave a particular location to make it," claims Robinson, "I'm stubborn and I had enough confidence to stay here and fight."

When you ask about lack of support for black artists in this State you touch a nerve with Robinson. "Black artists are not supported in North Carolina," he assures.

"Blacks aren't included in the Guild of Charlotte Artists. They've been excluded from the Mint Museum. (Since opening in 1948 the Mint Museum has only show-cased one black artist, Romare Bearden, to date.) The Charlotte Arts and Science Council does not give much aid to black Arts. To my knowledge the N.C. Arts Council hasn't awarded any grants to black or minority artists and blacks have been excluded from showings. Many of these organizations are supported by bond issues blacks have voted for. Blacks pay more taxes than anyone. But they are not benefitting from them," Robinson assures.

How does the 37-year old Robinson cope with this situation? "Perfection," he claims. The only way to prove yourself is through superiority. By really concentrating on my work I will not give them the excuse to exclude me.

"And I'm also being more vocal, letting them know that I know what's going on. I'm pushing for Blacks to form advocacy groups. We need to contact these Art support systems and demand what we want to see and hear in music productions, theater, visual art. We don't think we're suppose to participate in these type of things but it is our money which these organizations use. We have to receive our fair share," he concludes.

Robinson reflects that he does receive much support See Robinson On Page 8B



Tommy Robinson
....Successful artist



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