



Michele Roberts, ART WALK T-shirt artist

Michele Roberts was born and raised in Malibu and went to Oakwood High School, Santa Cruz University and Art Center College of Design. Her first professional solo show was at the Dumas Gallery in 1983. She is also shown at the Art Rental Gallery at LACMA, and just this Spring, LACMA bought a print of hers for its permanent collection. Michele lives with her husband, Andy Mayer, a toy inventor, and her dog, Jesso, in a bungalow near the beach on the border of Santa Monica and Venice. Mumsey Nemiroff, who teaches the "Art of Collecting Art" at UCLA, interviewed her for the ART WALK book.

Mumsey Nemiroff: What made you decide to become an artist?

Michele Roberts: I decided to become an artist when I was three. That's too young to decide what to do with the rest of your life, but it's what I decided. Both my parents were artists. I used to watch my mother painting. I just loved watching her paint, and I'd beg to use her oils . . .

Nemiroff: So that becoming an artist was really part of your karma?

Roberts: Well, it was just all around me. The house was full of art books, and we lived in Malibu, so we were isolated from the city and the mall and the shopping. We had a lot of time to sit and look at nature and wander around and look at the rocks. It was very conducive to drawing.

Nemiroff: Prints are also a very important part of your work?

Roberts: Yes. At Oakwood, everybody did a senior project. They took a month and they got to do whatever they wanted. They worked on film crew or they wrote a book or they went to Mexico. I went to Santa Cruz where Kay Metz

was teaching at the University of Santa Cruz. I did a month of Viscosity print-making, and then I had a portfolio of prints to show.

Nemiroff: Where do you get your inspirations from . . . do you ever meditate or use the beach for creative filling-up?

Roberts: For creative filling-up? I read a lot. The people who influenced my work are Milan Kundera, Joyce Carol Oates, and Truman Capote.

Nemiroff: So, you don't necessarily do art reading?

Roberts: I hate art reading . . . it drives me insane . . . art historians talking about art. I'd much rather read about writers talking about the process of writing . . . writers talking about the creative process are much more understandable than art historians talking about it.

Nemiroff: Are the beaches in Malibu and Venice very different?

Roberts: Yes. But I like it here because of the variety of people in Venice. There's everybody, every type of person speaking every language.

Nemiroff: The imagery that you use is very international and diverse. It's very primitive and yet it's contemporary.

Roberts: I was influenced by primitive artists: Africans and the North Canadian Eskimos.

Nemiroff: The symbols you use are more informational or narrative than visual.

Roberts: At Art Center, where I did paintings, I also did cartoons for other students. The whole class visited two artists and they were starving; it was so depressing. Then they became commercial artists and they were happy and had money. The class became depressed by this, and that's how the cartoon strip started. I did cartoons about the process of being an artist in society. What are we looking for? What are we talking about? And I found that when people looked at my paintings, they would interpret a lot of what was going on, and when they would look at my cartoons, they knew what was going on. So that's another thing . . . the division of the space and the words . . . so. I decided to put the two together. And I liked the idea.

Nemiroff: Doing one of your images on a T-shirt is very much in keeping with your interest in pop culture.

Roberts: (chuckle) Yeah.