

## Reflections on the Gallery World 2010 – Catherine Little Bert

For the past twenty years I have pursued a career in the gallery business here in Rhode Island. Trained as a researcher and psychologist, I married into an art family, my father-in-law was an art dealer, and I began to collect at the age of 25. By my 29th birthday my husband and I opened Bert Gallery to “promote the under appreciated” Rhode Island artists. Well - we are still at it! It has been a journey of intrigue, joy and hard work with many more projects yet to complete.

The gallery business alone is a tremendous challenge. When I first read the history of Vose Gallery, founded here in Providence in 1842 and still thriving today in Boston, the discouraging statistics of gallery survival were sobering, only 10% are able to make it past 5 years. But the entrepreneur in me was confident that with the tremendous quality of artists in Rhode Island the public would appreciate and acquire local talent. My passion is to document the incredible artist stories and preserve the legacies of visual artists who worked, created and thrived in the capitol city for decades. How could anyone resist the paintings of talented past generations who traveled abroad for art instruction and in their own lifetimes garnered serious collectors and critical art attention? It has taken time and patience to research, document and share with the community the rich artistic heritage in their midst. Along the way it was hard to resist working with some of the great contemporary artistic talent in Rhode Island and thus the gallery mission of promoting Rhode Island artists shifted to a more ambitious time line.

Aside from publishing articles and chapters on the burgeoning Rhode Island art colony, over the years I have curated over one hundred exhibits at my space and in community galleries, lectured at multiple venues and supervised interns from Providence College, RISD, URI and RIC, passing onto future generations the legacy of the Rhode Island visual arts community. Whether it is going to a national meeting talking about a great woman artist from Rhode Island, like Grace Albee, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, doing a lecture on the nuts and bolts of the art world to the a group of artists at the Pawtucket Arts Council or lecturing about the life of a 19th century Rhode Island artist, over time indeed I have found the local community is anxious to understand the visual arts and relishes the opportunity to experience first hand how the arts fit into their lives.

However, it was in 1997 that a unique art venture materialized, Gallery Night Providence. The seeds for a cooperative arts venture were planted during a Convergence Festival and resulted the next month in the birth of Gallery Night Providence where a cross section of galleries, historical sites and museums come together to open their doors one night a month. I was a founding member and remain co-president of this event, which provides free public access to the complex and diversified arts community in Providence. In one evening with one fell swoop a visitor, a child, a student, a family or a collector can experience the visual arts think tank of Providence. For my gallery, Gallery Night Providence has become one more opportunity to reach new audiences and offer programs around the quality artists in the community.

Every one of us in the arts community plays a role in promoting a better awareness of the visual arts. Visual processing of information is a key component to intellectual development and paramount to mastering the sophisticated and technological world that surrounds us. As the purveyor of a capitalistic enterprise in the visual arts, I have the freedom to be creative and take risks according to my vision developed as a result of a clear historical understanding of the cultural development in Providence and in turn respond to the conditions of my time and of my community.

It is within that commercial gallery model that I feel I have been most effective promoting individual artists and art culture. Hundreds of professional artists live in our community. They are highly trained and create valued objects, which will speak to future generations and to other cultures about our time and our place in history. It is a great privilege that destiny plopped me right down within the most celebrated creative maelstroms in the country, Providence, Rhode Island.