

Art as a Doorway to *beauty, health, and community*

An Interview with ROBIN LIEBERMAN,
Founder and Curator of the Art Hall exhibition space
at Cedarwood Waldorf School in Portland

I met psychotherapist, art therapist, and Art Hall gallery founder and director Robin Lieberman last fall when I attended a watercolor course offered in conjunction with Jennifer Thomson's Portland Art Hall exhibit. We met up again this spring in Seattle and toured the Seattle Art Museum before squeezing into a crowded café where we had the following conversation about art, color, and The Art Hall at Cedarwood Waldorf School. After you read this story, please visit thearthall.wordpress.com and read the stories of the artists who have exhibited in the past at this wonderful community art space. —Christy Korrow

LILIPOH: *Robin, will you share a little bit with us about your connection to art and where you're coming from as an artist?*

ROBIN: I've considered myself an artist my entire life. I had lost my way for awhile, then rediscovered myself and a whole new way of looking at art and color; a whole new way of appreciating and understanding it, when my children entered the Cedarwood Waldorf School. It was a new beginning for me when I encountered art from an anthroposophic perspective. The concept of form coming out of color whisked me away into another level of existence!

I discovered Liane Collot d' Herbois and her therapeutic art book, *Light, Color and Darkness in Therapeutic Painting*. Around that time, I met the anthroposophic artist, nurse, and educator

Jannebeth Röell and told her about the book I had discovered. She suggested that we study together, and begin with Rudolf Steiner's *Color Lectures*. I realized that I wanted to be able to offer painting therapy as a modality within my psychotherapy practice, as a way to combine two of my life's passions. And I asked Jannebeth to be my mentor. We continued to work weekly from Liane's seminal book for about five years; and our relationship evolved into a warm friendship where we still paint together, with others, nearly weekly...for almost ten years now.

From my early days as an artist, I always knew art was a doorway and there was something on the other side, but I didn't know how to access it or walk through it. Through studying Collot and veil painting I began to experience more of a knowingness in my

Robin Lieberman, founder and director of
The Art Hall gallery space.



“I walked into the beautifully remodeled annex
and I just saw an art gallery!”

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soul about the existence of color as beings who are here for us.

LILIPOH: *When you say that there was a “doorway”—please say more about what you mean by that. A doorway from where to where?*

ROBIN: From my limited understanding of color and its existence, as we generally know it, to a spiritual understanding of art. Color became another way for me to access the spiritual world.

LILIPOH: *It’s wonderful to hear how you started to immerse yourself into this new kind of painting out of color. Tell us the story of how that led you to want to share anthroposophic art with more people and to eventually develop the exhibit space, The Art Hall. Why did you start it?*

ROBIN: With my degree in art history, having studied art exhibitions in museums and galleries,

a background in retailing, and 25 years as a psychotherapist, one of my dreams in this life was to have a gallery or community meeting place where there was art and music and good food. In some ways, The Art Hall is a manifestation of part of my destiny.

Our family came to Cedarwood on the tail end of the first year of the school’s existence. We were one of the pioneer families. As time went on, the school purchased a historic building that for more than a hundred years, was a vibrant part of the Portland community. It had been home to a school where there were May Faires and dancing around the maypole; it housed the first swimming pool in Portland, and the first Vietnamese restaurant. It is on the National Register of Historic Buildings, known as The Neighborhood House, originally owned by the National Council of Jewish Women. By the time



Community members gather at the Regional Sketch Group Exhibit.

the Cedarwood was ready to occupy this annex building, both of our children had graduated from the eighth grade.

Nevertheless, having been part of the vision and preparation for the school's extended home, our family maintained our connection to the school community. When this new building opened up, I walked into the beautifully remodeled annex and I just saw an art gallery!

I wrote a proposal to the College of Teachers stating that I would like to make a space dedicated to the future of THE ARTS (in capital letters) from an anthroposophic perspective. As you know, the Waldorf education curriculum is created out of rhythm, like that which lives in music and art. It's a healing curriculum about breathing, and that's so much of what color is and what art is. We need to keep that alive.

Churchill's words during World War II come to mind. When asked if the schools should cut the arts to help support the war effort, he is reported to have said, "If we're not fighting for art, then what are we fighting for?" It's an interesting side note that he was a watercolorist himself.

LILIPOH: *I love the concept of having a gallery space dedicated to artists working out of Rudolf Steiner's impulse. The only other anthroposophically-focused gallery that I know of is the 78th Street Gallery in Santa Fe. I know some of the branches of the Anthroposophical Society do host occasional exhibits as well.*

ROBIN: I can't define what anthroposophic art is; there's an ongoing discussion about that. But we do know that when we look at certain works of art, we experience something a little bit different. The Art Hall is also an educational tool for people in



Local artists participate in a course offered by exhibiting artist Marie-Laure Valandro.

“The concept of form coming out of color whisked me away into another level of existence!”

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the community. It's an effort to keep art alive into the future. There is value and a healing impact it can have when you're surrounded by it. And when there's no artwork up on the walls, it really looks dead. It's so obvious now that we have the color up there, half of the year. It's quite stunning!

LILIPOH: *I am impressed by the professional presentation of the works.*

ROBIN: The Art Hall is a non-profit venture, and a labor of love. A percentage of each painting sold is donated by the artist to support The Art Hall. This has allowed us to install a professional gallery-style hanging system for the artwork and it pays for the advertising and abundant hospitality table at

the opening receptions. The professional standard is also a way to show respect for the art and to honor the artist. As a therapist, I see a person's potential and support them to experience themselves more fully.

There have been a few artists who've been shy about showing their work, but felt a lot of support and encouragement, so they've moved forward and put themselves out there. It really is a big deal to expose oneself that way and allow it to be, because paintings don't lie. The artist may be a channel for something coming through, but it's coming through that particular person; so the work says a lot about the artist as well. It takes a certain kind of courage

to say, “Okay, I’m going to mat and frame this and put it out there for people to look at.”

LILIPOH: *How do you select your art?*

ROBIN: Janebeth Röell was our inaugural artist in 2013. In addition to being my friend, colleague, mentor, and great support, she had been on the board of Cedarwood for six years, so I wanted to honor her for all that she’s given to the school.

The second exhibit came out of a faculty retreat led by Ted Mahle. The teachers created some absolutely stunning pastel works. The teachers talked about their experiences doing the work, so this added a dimension of interest to the opening of that show.

Laura Summer (who many of your readers may know as the co-founder of Free Columbia in the Hudson Valley in New York), asked if Portland might be ready for an “art dispersal.” Laura is always doing something avant garde and innovative. So this courageous woman rolled up 36 canvasses and put them in a tube and mailed them from New York to Portland, Oregon. We hung them up and had an art dispersal and it was phenomenal.

Pam Whitman, who is just about the most lovely, gracious, warm, kind-hearted therapeutic artist I know had these magnificent veil paintings. She came in and did a workshop and exhibited her work and gave a deeply moving presentation—it was wonderful!

I invite the readers to visit our blog to see many of the wonderful works of art that have graced The Art Hall. Now that the gallery is more established, I am being approached by artists who want to exhibit, which is wonderful.

LILIPOH: *Sounds like an organic process.*

ROBIN: It’s working the way a painting gets created.

LILIPOH: *That’s a good metaphor.*

ROBIN: A little bit of luck never hurts, and I have a lot of support. In a way, it’s a family affair. My beautiful son has made the flyers for workshops

TOP: Pamela Whitman, visiting/exhibiting artist, teaching veil painting workshop.

BOTTOM: Visiting artist Jennifer Thomson demonstrates veil painting at a week-long course offered in conjunction with her Art Hall exhibit.



“The economic support of the artist is so important.”



SUNSET FROM MANZANITA, AN OREGON BEACH TOWN.
Pastel by Robin Lieberman

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associated with the exhibits, and my husband helped me design the blog.

LILIPOH: *What's the community response been like?*

ROBIN: Some openings have had approximately 200 people. Different artists attract different audiences, but there's been ardent support from the Portland Branch of the Anthroposophical Society, and there's a core group of people who've been at every opening. And, of course, the Cedarwood community. We even have a bit of an international following on the blog posts!

Essentially, the bottom line is that children, teachers, parents, and guests at the school come and go through the building's Art Hall every single day and receive the healing of each of these pieces of artwork that are displayed there. When appropriate, a teacher will bring his or her students in to look at the art, so the works of art are being used as a teaching tool.

LILIPOH: *What strikes me from my very short exposure to the Portland anthroposophic community is the richness of the people working out of the artistic impulse.*

ROBIN: Yes, there are a number of artists and

painting groups working out of anthroposophy. When we can, we work with the exhibiting artists to offer a course or a workshop. We have been able to bring artists in from other parts of the country. This is a wonderful aspect of the maturing health of The Art Hall, that we can afford to pay the artists' expenses to travel to Portland and teach. We can share in the shipping costs of the art work, as well as host them as our guests.

LILIPOH: *This economic support of the artist is so important. It ties into the question of how important it is to value art for what it offers us on our inner path and for what it can bring socially. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.*

ROBIN: During my last year in high school, my painting teacher taught an art history class and it opened up a whole new world to me. I realized that I was interested not just in the art, but also in who is creating this art, and how art is always expressive of the consciousness and creative impulse of the time. Fast-forward in time to my learning about Laura Summer, who says that each piece of artwork has its own life and work to do in the world and needs to be somewhere.

Many years ago, there was art hanging everywhere, in everyone's home. It wasn't just for people who could afford it, or an investment, like buying real estate. But Laura really brought that concept of "art for everyone" into focus to me.

It's what we were given along the spiritual road as human beings—to create art. I think it's part of our mission as human beings to trust the integrity of our creative spirit, whichever way you express it. It doesn't have to be making art, but it means expressing our creativity in some capacity. Art is a clear expression of will. If we don't have our creativity in our imagination, then we are going to die.

LILIPOH: *We are going to die?*

ROBIN: We all know that we are in this current age of the intellect and technology. We are not asking the question often enough, how do I engage my heart?

How do I engage my heart more? That's what we have to do; and one way of doing that it is through art—whether it's looking at it or creating it. In having a relationship with art, an experience with art, you have a relationship and experience with yourself in a deeper way.

LILIPOH: *And through that art can become a hygienic or a healing force.*

ROBIN: The more people whose hands touch a paintbrush, the better the world will be. It's not about whether you're a good artist or not. It's about trust and keeping alive your sense of curiosity and wonder about what can happen.

LILIPOH: *Well said. Thank you!* 📖

art hall artists for the 2017/2018 academic year

CURRENT AWSNA Welcome Cedarwood Acquisitions from The Art Hall and her artists.

FALL Jacqueline Freeman, photographs of elemental beings. *Opens Sept. 14.*

WINTER Laura Summer will offer an Art Dispersal Jan. 19 and a two-day workshop on the Gospel of St. John. Jan. 20-21.

SPRING A collaboration between Tom Klein, string art, and Martin Levin, geometric wire sculptures.

Chuck Andrade, who led a weekend lazure workshop at Cedarwood Waldorf School and beautified the Performance Space. *Tentative.*

special events

Five-Year Anniversary Exhibit & Celebration

Multi-Artistic Collaboration between musicians, eurythmists and visual artists, bringing to life Rudolf Steiner's beautiful story, *The Being Of The Arts.*