



The Clyde Fitch Report.

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Punk to Painting: The Life and Art of Pamela Roberts

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The CFR is honored to partner with POBA.org on profiles of its affiliated artists. What is POBA.org?

POBA.org is a unique site dedicated to showcasing, promoting and preserving the creative work of exceptional artists — in all forms of artistic expression — who have died without recognition of the full measure of their talents or creative legacies. [POBA](#) is designed to be a great place to see exceptional art that might otherwise not be seen by the public and to be a full-spectrum resource for those responsible for artistic legacies of talented, deceased artists. POBA's mission is simple: POBA aims to keep their creative works alive, and through them to inspire, provoke, intrigue, entertain, and enliven us. POBA is Where The Arts Live!

In this post, we focus on [artist Pamela Roberts \(1953-98\)](#), whose work, informed by the 1970s punk rock scene and affinity for body art, was catalyzed by her own personal health struggles. In this post, Roberts is recalled by her sister, Cindy Mooney.

Who was Pamela Roberts? [From her POBA biography:](#)

Pamela (Brown) Roberts became interested in art as a teen-ager, graduating from the highly selective New York City High School of Visual Arts. As she would ruefully later say, she learned a lot about art concepts from her formal studies but not nearly enough about how to draw. A true polymath, after graduation she sidetracked into the punk music scene, becoming a well-known regular at CBGB's, the legendary East Village punk music club. She wrote for Punk magazine. For a time she was Joey Ramone's girlfriend.

She met and married the noted tattoo artist, Bob Roberts, and upon moving to Los Angeles revived her interest in art. When her twin sister, Kathy, contracted and then died from breast cancer, Pam's urge to get back into art became much stronger. She immersed herself in learning how to draw and trying out different styles, continuing to do so even after getting breast cancer herself.

Working with growing urgency as she fought the disease, Pam became increasingly adept and increasingly original in her paintings. She began to attract attention in L.A.'s "urban outsider" art community. Her eye for color, her fine sense of proportion, her innate sweetness, and her wit and humor pervade her work, infusing them with qualities that make them stand out. She had several gallery showings, and she sold paintings to a number of celebrity art collectors, including Nicolas Cage and Tony Curtis....

What's the most perceptive question anyone could have asked Pamela about her work?

I am not in a position to answer questions for Pam, though I can speak about Pam as I knew her. As a person and as an artist, she was really perceptive and could see below the surface of appearances. For parts of her life, Pam lived in a world that was edgy, even hard, and she faced many tough challenges. Yet Pam was a sweetheart, always. She would have appreciated and admired what it took to be seen for who she was and not simply for who she appeared to be. So, from my vantage point, the most perceptive question she could have been asked is this: *"Do you consider yourself a romantic?"*



"Mr. Bigstuff (at home)," 1993. All images courtesy of POBA. For full images, [click here](#).

What's the most idiotic question anyone could have asked Pamela about her work? What's the weirdest question anyone could have asked Pamela about her work?

Hard to tell what might be the most idiotic or the weirdest question anyone would've asked Pam about her paintings. She certainly had an unconventional, humorous outlook on life, and I think that much of her art throughout her life captures this perspective. In fact, her wedding gift to me and my husband was a quirky, charming scrapbook of collages depicting the two of us with the heads of different cats and telling the story of our lives to come (which was surprisingly accurate)! It remains one of my favorite wedding gifts. So how does one say what is weird to someone who sees the world like that? Storytelling has always been a part of Pam's very inventive art — in her wedding gift to me, through her writing, in her paintings, and even in her musical ditties. She once wrote an extraordinarily clever and funny song about a falling out my husband had with a friend. We still sing it to this day!



"Gauguin at Hiva Oa," 1992

Pam's idiosyncratic style shows throughout the different "periods" of her work. The Mafia paintings recall our childhood growing up in New Jersey, where rumored and real mafiosi stories abounded. Her motorcycle paintings depict her early

married life with the renowned tattoo artist, Bob Roberts, and his escapades as a member of a motorcycle gang. [Pam's magnificent Tahiti painting was her homage to Paul Gauguin](#), one of her favorite artists. Perhaps it was also a reminder to herself of the year she spent in Hawaii, when she needed to escape from her life in L.A. for a while. Her dancing paintings coincide with the end of her marriage, her emotional healing, and her openness to finding love once again. Pam's flower paintings — her last series — came toward the end of her life, and I think that she was perhaps reflecting on all the beauty that exists in the world. But, that is my interpretation — not Pam's own words.

So — idiotic, weird? Those are not words that I associate with my sister Pam's thinking, although she certainly moved, and thrived, in unusual circles. There were definitely times in my life when I thought of her life and friends as weird. But never idiotic.



Pamela Roberts

Because you knew Pam first as a sister, then as a creative individual, how would you describe her artistic evolution? Do you think that she, for example, always had the soul of an Pam was always a creative and gentle soul, with an insightful sense of humor. I think she began to think of herself as an artist when she was in high school. In college, when conceptual art was all the rage, she experimented with varied media, and after college, writing became her primary means of expression — but she never left visual art behind. It wasn't until she was in her 30s that she went fully back to painting and found her "home" there. She saw the world's beauty and ironies, and expressed her feelings through her art (like all artists), whether painting, drawing, sculpting, or writing — all of which she did.

Though she was an artist from her early teens, Pam came "into her own" as a painter as an adult — long after she had left New York City for Los Angeles. We did not have deep conversations about the meaning of her paintings or how she felt about them, or what people asked her about her art. Our deepest conversations centered on our relationships, our children, our families. Pam did share her excitement about her development as a painter, the great pleasure she found in painting every day in her light-filled home, and her delight when she began to be recognized as an [emerging talent in the L.A. art scene](#). And she loved that I was proud of her work and wanted to hang her pieces in my own home. She called me her "Theo."

Pam's immersion into painting and explorations on canvas (although, remember, she had already been writing for many years for various punk music publications and she did go to the School of Visual Arts) began when she was in her mid-30s. I'm guessing that at that point, her daughter was no longer a toddler so she had more time, and perhaps the act of creating helped Pam to cope with the strife of her marriage, which ultimately dissolved, and the [death of her twin sister from breast cancer](#) and Pam's own diagnosis shortly thereafter.

Pam was an optimist — always was. I think it runs in my family. Her greatest joy in life was her daughter Ava, and she also found great pleasure in a caring circle of very interesting friends (largely artists!) and in her last few years, new love. And her joy in going “back” to being an artist and in putting her life experiences on canvas was apparent through the paintings she created. Pam always saw the humor and fun in life — even the tough parts, and this too, I believe is [apparent in her paintings](#).

She passed her talent on, too. Her daughter showed artistic talent early on — not surprising given the fact that both her parents are very talented artists. Pam took great pride in this and believed that *all* children have artistic, creative souls that should be nurtured. She was very proud of a curriculum she wrote for children titled “Art Is a Great Idea.”



Cindy Mooney

In retrospect, what about body art intrigued Pam? What would she think of the way in which body art has become an influencer in contemporary society?

I wouldn't say body art particularly intrigued Pam. She spent many years immersed in a world where that was one of many ways in which people expressed themselves. After all, she was married to one of the world's great tattoo artists. Were she to see how pervasive body art is today, I think she would be delighted. Pam very much believed that people should be able to do as they wished as long as they didn't hurt anyone else in the process. As an artist, Pam appreciated all artistic expression.



“Crystal Lake Casino,” 1992

If Pam were still with us, can you describe one or two types or forms of visual art that you can easily see her trying and mastering? Did she have dreams for her work that she never realized? If so, what were they?

I think Pam would've continued painting and experimenting with new subject matter. She explored topics and then moved on to other ones. Perhaps, were she still alive, she would revisit earlier themes and explore them from a new perspective. Over time she would have experimented with different materials and media, and maybe even with digital media. Take a look at her art and it is plain as day that she was both contemporary and changing all the time. I don't think that would have changed, ever. But really, who can put themselves inside anyone else's head (especially that of a creative individual) and say where that person would

have gone? As far as dreams for her work, Pam wanted to continue painting (that I know) as she felt that she was really re-discovering her own talents in her last years. And, like all of us, she hoped to be successful in pursuing what she loved to do.