

Artist Profile: Stephanie Robertson

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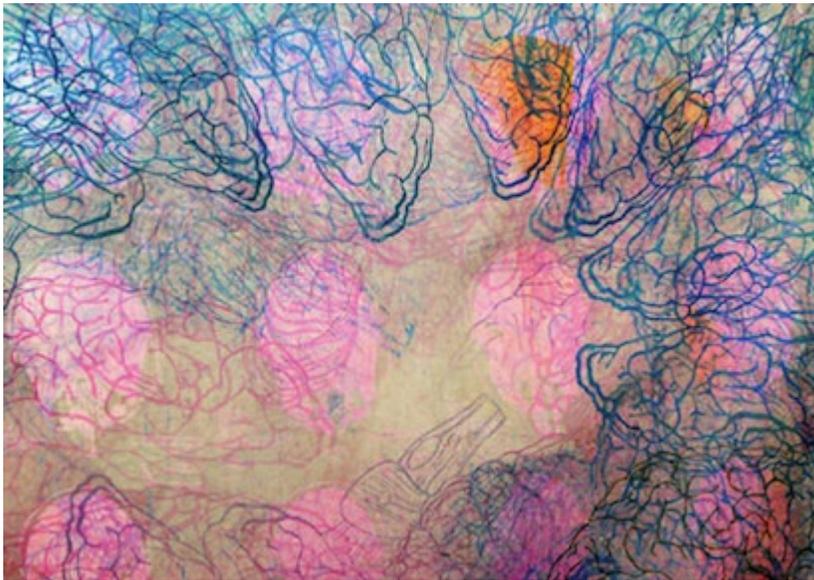
Infinite Moment of Now

Indianapolis Art Center
Through July 31, 2011

Indianapolis Art Center: www.indplsartcenter.org

Stephanie Lewis Robertson: www.fabricsinger.com

Marg Herder: www.margherder.com



Fabric artist [Stephanie Lewis Robertson's](http://www.fabricsinger.com) current exhibit at the Indianapolis Art Center, *The Infinite Moment of Now*, came about when her husband Tom suffered a stroke two years ago. "The doctors never expected him to recover," says Stephanie, a teaching artist with Young Audiences of Indiana and a member of the Stutz Artists Association.

With this show, Stephanie transformed her personal ordeal with her husband's stroke into an art installation, inviting the viewer to join them on their journey of pain, recovery and healing.

The exhibit begins with five silk-screen panels. As you enter, the audio recording by sound engineer [Marg Herder](http://www.margherder.com) takes you back to June 23, 2009, to the hospital critical care unit where Tom, hooked up to machines and tubes, lay in a medically induced coma. Tom had suffered both a hemorrhagic and ischemic stroke (a bleed and a clot) and was induced into a coma for several days, put on a ventilator and given a feeding tube. Herder, who stayed with Tom and Stephanie, received permission to record the hospital sounds.

The display is in the shape of a spiral, motivating one to walk toward the center. Stephanie notes, "In a

critical care waiting room, you do not stand on the edge. You are immersed in it. You have no choice." The shape is also reminiscent of a hurricane, as both Tom and Stephanie witnessed hurricane Hugo. Tom's stroke, like the hurricane, brought chaos. Stephanie says, "This was a life-altering experience. Both of us want people to understand that this is the one life that we have, and it can change in 15 minutes."

One hand painted silk-screen panel at the entrance is awash in deep red: a serious, life-threatening wound. There are paper-laminated handwritten journal entries fused with brain scan images. Smaller panels contain MRI images of Tom's brain.

Stephanie says, "The caregivers and neurological specialists who walk through this exhibit say, 'Yes, I recognize that: Traumatic Brain Injury.'" She adds, "This show is about being present, when it was harsh and horrible, and being present when it was gentle and calm."

Stephanie is emphatic when she says, "I always believed Tom would get well; I didn't know *how well*, but I knew he was going to come back, and I kept telling the doctors as long as I get his humor back that will be enough for me, and I got a lot more than that."

Prayers and Faith

Fashioned after Tibetan prayer flags, the smaller exhibit panels are secured with white strips twirled around gray stones. Stephanie explains the stones: "Part of it is that I needed to stabilize the pieces, so they had enough strength to not move as people walked by. The other part is the stones are grounding to Mother Earth. I wanted the panels to be like prayer flags but then I wanted that holding to the ground; I anticipated straight up and down but they angle out, like they are saying: 'thank you' and 'gratitude to the world.'"

Tom, whose involvement with numerous theaters in Indy include the Phoenix and Buck Creek Players, adds: "The stones remind me of the security stone I held when I was agitated and running a fever. A friend of ours brought a stone from Lake Michigan and, even when I was sort of unconscious, it was a real throwback to growing up and swimming in a lake in Canada, which was my favorite thing to do. The coolness and smell of the stone was very soothing and calming for me."

The audio recording component includes songs, prayers and voices of those who cared for Tom and Stephanie. In preparation for this show, Herder asked those who were involved in Tom's healing to come in for a recording. "What emerged," Herder says, "just like at the hospital, are Buddhist prayers, Unitarian Universalist prayers, Christian prayers, Wiccan and Pagan prayers, Native American prayers, along with small ensemble singers and large ensemble singers... all part of Tom and Stephanie's spiritual community."

Herder adds, "Sitting in that hospital room alone with Tom every night, alarms going off over the hypnotic noises of the pumps and respirator, was -- perhaps strangely -- the most connected to the gentle loving truth of Spirit I have ever felt."

Stephanie's art students from Ivy Tech assisted with the installation. She says, "This helps them learn not just what you have to do to be an artist, but also how to give back to the community in a way they never would have before. And it helps them know that there is a bigger thing in the world... there's so much more."

Herder adds, "I think this show is a 'thank you' on so many levels. A thank you to Spirit for this experience, thank you for Tom being okay, and thank you for Tom and Stephanie's community... Don't

ever let anybody tell you that you can't make miracles because if you can bring a bunch of people together who believe it, astounding things happen."

Important Life Lessons

Toward the center of the exhibit, the panels become lighter. The songs and prayers and voices continue: gentle, loving, melodic.

Stephanie says, "The doctors and nurses at the neurological critical care unit at Methodist Hospital were amazing; there are nurses there I trust my life with."

Tom agrees: "They were very respectful of the various nontraditional healing methods and diverse spiritual practices that are an important part of our faith community.

"I had people perform Reiki on me," he continues, "and it was very calming and helped me sleep. Thinking about the experience and process, it's really a case where: $1 + 1 = 3$. The experience I acquaint it with is when you have a theater performance and you have a good script, good cast and good design and you put it all together and suddenly, you get magic. Then you have a similar situation for another show and you get $1 + 1 = 2$. It's like trying to figure out that thing that makes it more than the sum of its parts."

Stephanie says, "We can talk about the practical ways in which our lives have changed, but those things are not important. What is important is that we are more in love with this world. If we would all embrace that love and feeling, this world would be a much better place."

"The thing that was amazing about hurricane Hugo," Tom reflects, "is that when the hurricane passes, and right before, it's incredibly beautiful."

He pauses, then adds, "But you sort of have to survive the storm."

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<http://www.nuvo.net/gyrobase/artist-profile-stephanie-robertson/Content?oid=2269457&mode=print>
