

Rodriguez Contemporary Gallery has become an online success story

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Lack of time; feeling it's less important; no idea what you like; a little intimidated about visiting a gallery: these are all reasons why you might hire an art consultant to find the right painting for your place of pride in your living room or go to an online art gallery for that initial browse.

Springing from this idea, founder and owner of the new online art gallery, Rodriguez Contemporary Gallery, is Teresa Brownell.

"It's been two years in the making and three years in my head. But we finally got it up," Ms. Brownell told the Citizen.

"There are two website addresses that lead to the same place: www.artgalleryonline.ca and www.rodriguescontemporary.com, [the latter being the actual name of the online gallery].

"I put the www.artgalleryonline.ca out on purpose, in case people found the name hard to remember. When they can get there and see it, they'll like it and remember.

"These paintings that we show are all originals. Mimi Matte, for example, she died in 2012 but the family wanted to sell her pictures rather than store many of them. "Mimi's son is a musician and my son, Ian, was actually in a music program taught by her son. Ian told me about him and his mother and I looked her up and thought she would be a great fit."

Describing the website and how it works, Ms. Brownell said, "There are five artists on the slide at a time" across the top of the home page. "Mark Anthony Jacobson was the last artist to exhibit with Norval Morrisseau, who was part of the woodland movement of aboriginal painting."

Meeting artists has happened over a few decades of being in the art world.

"Some I have met through the Bartlett gallery, where I was the director for 10 years, in the Alton Mill Arts Centre. We had many shows and I met many artists, some of them are local.

"That, plus going to art fairs, which are almost like a trade shows, in Toronto. There is one called the artists' project. That's in a hall, with art hanging on the walls and displayed and the artists stationed by their work, waiting to talk about it to collectors, gallery owners, retailers.

"Studio tours, anything art related I'm going to be there," she assured us.

Her background did not hint at where she was going at the outset: "I was actually going to become a legal secretary in Toronto. When I moved up this way, after I met my husband, I decided to stay home with my kids and I started painting. As a painter, I was very interested in the art world and that's how I started and even became addicted to art. I was always more interested in contemporary art, which doesn't necessarily mean 'modern art'. They are two different movements: Modern art 1880's to 1960's is more representational. From the 1960's on, that's Contemporary art, considered to be more social commentary."

She told us, "In 1998, I was in Shelburne and studied with Sandy Herron. She was my mentor and taught me everything, the basics really. I fell in love with portraiture through her. I do paint portraits," she remarked. "I have done commissions."

Of her three sons, she mentioned in passing, "My eldest is a chef, a caterer; the middle boy is a welder and volunteer fire fighter; the youngest loves music, animation and he loves to travel."

Returning to the bones of the art that fascinates Ms. Brownell primarily and what she plans to continue to carry, mainly, in her gallery, 'Contemporary. Anything painted after the 1960's, with a preference for those that claim to be 'more about social commentary.'

'When I started to go to back to work,' she continued, 'I applied to law firms with no success. I tried one art shop and got the job. I've been working in the art business since then.'

'I started a website 'in2art' which I used as a blog about different art. Then I thought of a website, iCurate. I was planning on doing more work as an art consultant and discovering art work, not just locally, writing different articles about different art. That's what I was going to start. I just wanted to share [knowledge about art]'. But there were too many reasons not to use that name. When push came to shove, I didn't want that name; why don't I rename the website after myself ' my maiden name: call it Rodrigues Contemporary.'

'I've met so many artists. Some called on me while I was working at the Bartlett Gallery, which closed 2017. That's when Michael [her former employer] called me to work for him at F-Stop. I started there part-time, to also work on my website.'

'I work with a local web designer. I had my vision and she has worked with it. I saw how hard it was for the Bartlett to keep the doors open: bricks and mortar.'

She commented with sadness, 'So many galleries are closing because of that. So, my gallery is virtual, working with a collector base.'

Marketing is huge part of gallery work and Teresa Brownell recommends, 'Instagram is a great resource. I was a bit of a social media wiz. I like to learn about a lot of things and it's a great avenue of discovery. You can promote things and pay but it can be free. I'm still getting inquiries from people on Instagram, even since it was bought out.'

The way it works is, 'A lot of it starts off with artists I've worked with before. Over ten years, you get to know artists through the web. I attend events.'

'Prices are not on the website yet,' said she, shifting a bit, 'Today's consumers are smart consumers. They want to look at what they want; to browse without any pressure. Consumers were afraid to go into a gallery. They felt intimidated. I used watch them start to come into the Bartlett and then back off. So, that online approach takes that out of the equation.'

'The bottom line is you still have to build a relationship. You still have to talk to people: in order to have a relationship, you have to talk to people.'

'Our paintings come with certificates of authenticity.'

'It's a trust thing.'

Ms. Brownell commented, 'Art after 1960 is a very broad spectrum. Could be traditional; could be abstract. Anything.'

'Right now, my ambition is, eventually, to have actual exhibitions online. Eventually, to have a pop-up gallery, in partnership with my son, Neil, the caterer, his company is Foodies Anonymous. He just bought it this year. He was working for them and had the chance to buy the business. He wanted to be a chef since he was a kid and started working in restaurants, bussing when he was 13. He had lots of odd jobs and they were always in a kitchen.'

'People will want to come to visit my websites because they'll be seeing art work they probably haven't seen before, always changing. I always want more artists.'

?There is no pressure online. You can ask any questions; contact us with a phone number eventually.

?Art work is available to everyone at every price. There could be a sketch that is original, that is affordable.

?And the beauty for an artist is that I don't keep their inventory until I have a customer that wants to take it home.?

Check out this very contemporary approach to art sales, at www.rodriguescontemporary.com, which you can also access at www.artgalleryonline.ca.