

LA JOLLA LIGHT



Artist Michael Robinson holds his piece "Dance Cadaverous" in the Legends Gallery of La Jolla. (Tracy Robinson)

BY ELISABETH FRAUSTO
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With an eye on reframing his talent once again, Michael Robinson is in the midst of his first gallery exhibit in La Jolla, with an appearance planned for next month.

Four of Robinson's contemporary paintings are on display at [Legends Gallery](#) through January.

Robinson, a former reporter and musician who lives in Northern California, will be at the gallery at 1205 Prospect St. at 5 p.m. Friday, Dec. 2, as part of La Jolla's [First Friday Art Walk](#).

One of his pieces, "Dance Cadaverous," is "Picasso meets punk rock," Robinson said — a mix of Pablo Picasso's early self-portrait and Andy Warhol's aesthetic with a quote from a 1972 proto-punk song by Jonathan Richman that references Picasso.

"I Prevail" is named after Robinson's favorite hard rock band. "Inglorious" is "From Dusk Till Dawn."



"I Prevail" is named after artist Michael Robinson's favorite hard rock band. (Provided by Michael Robinson)

The fourth piece, “Ansonia Takes an Aria,” quotes a lyric from hard rock band Three Days Grace.

The show is at Legends because Robinson and his wife, both art collectors, have known Legends owner Roree Mayhew for about nine years.

“We love La Jolla,” Robinson said. “We try to get down there once a year” to visit and shop for art.”

Robinson’s art “speaks to me,” Mayhew said. “It’s something I haven’t seen in a while. It’s a little bit outsider art [with] classic influences.” Mayhew said he gravitates toward Robinson’s paintings with writing on them, as they “hit little cultural spots here and there that I think have a little meaning.”

He said Robinson’s art fits well at Legends, which specializes “in whimsical art. We’re a fun gallery that’s accessible to just about anybody.” This is Robinson’s second exhibit, following a solo show in Lafayette in Contra Costa County in May.

Showing at Legends is “a real dream come true,” Robinson said. “This was the one place I really wanted to be represented.”

Robinson took up a spot at the easel six years ago at a painting party, realizing quickly that he was drawn to creating visual art. “I had this jolt of electricity,” he said.

It prompted him to pursue painting for the next four years under the pseudonym Ray Montenegro.

“I was in stealth mode,” Robinson said. “I wanted to get honest feedback from fellow artists, collectors [and] gallery owners ... without it being awkward for them or me.”

He shed the Montenegro persona two years ago and relaunched himself as ... himself.

“It just felt like the right time,” Robinson said. “I got to a new level; I had enough consistent good feedback.”

Before that, Robinson had a long career as a journalist, working for outlets including the *Kansas City Star* and *Oakland Tribune* and having his work printed in a dozen other California papers as well as in *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.

He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the 1984 Democratic National Convention in the *San Francisco Examiner*. While writing, Robinson began making rock and blues music, spending several years performing and releasing four CDs.

Each shift, from writer to rocker to painter, has meant Robinson has felt closer to his father, journalist Clarence Robinson, who died about a year ago.

“My dad was probably my biggest influence in my life,” he said. “He was a Renaissance man ... he could do everything,” Robinson said. He recalled that his father learned to play guitar and speak Russian and took on journalism assignments around the clock.

“From the time I was a kid, it just seemed natural for me to do a lot of different things,” Robinson said. “Fortunately, I work really hard at each one and get pretty good at it.”

Painting affords Robinson a space to explore “the big questions of life,” he said.

“I paint because there’s things I want to say about the world that I can’t say in a song or ... in a poem or in a short story or ... in a nonfiction piece.

That’s why there’s a lot of writing [on the paintings and] a lot of my titles harken back to something else. I’m trying to get a sense of humor; I’m trying to have people have a discovery experience.”