

SN&R

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GIFT GUIDE

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The SN&R's Gift Guide is around the corner. The Gift Guide is a weekly marketplace featuring the hottest jewelry, clothing, home décor, toys, electronics and other gift items from local retailers.

Help our readers give better (and cooler) gifts, with SN&R's Gift Guide.

If you are interested in being featured in our Gift Guide starting in November, then please contact us at (916) 498-1234.



Annie Murphy-Robinson's charcoal drawing "Emily and the Buffalo," is one of many autobiographical works depicting her daughters.

PHOTO BY PATRICK HYUN WILSON

Bold impressions

BY PATRICK HYUN WILSON

Sacramento-born Annie Murphy Robinson was always a foul-mouthed, no flack-taking kind of person ready to fight at a moment's notice—as long as she had her drugs. In 10th grade, her stepdad came home to find her smoking, drinking and blasting Black Sabbath. They ended up in an argument, one that prompted her to run away to San Francisco where she eventually landed in juvenile hall, entered the foster care system and emancipated from her parents.

All of this before age 16.

"Most nights for me, it ended in: I'm at a party, it's 4 or 5 a.m. Everybody's passed out or partnered up with their partners and they've gone away, and I'm checking old beers for cigarette butts 'cause I'm still losing it," said Murphy-Robinson, who now lives in Carmichael.

That was more than 25 years ago. Now, Murphy-Robinson is in a different place, spending as many as 700 hours on a single, massive photo-realistic charcoal drawing, often depicting her daughters in a style that evokes the American West.

Curator Steve Diamant had admired Murphy-Robinson's work for more than a decade when, in 2017, he decided to represent her at Arcadia Contemporary gallery in Los Angeles. Since then, her work has received acclaim; in 2019 she won the Bouguereau Award at the 14th annual Art Renewal Center, a nonprofit online museum.

"There's nobody I've ever seen that draws the way that she draws. Period," Diamant said.

But her journey to the artist's life may have never started if she didn't first get sober. In 1996, she started attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, where she

realized that without the coping mechanism she used throughout her teenage years, she felt vulnerable, raw and, most of all, bored out of her mind.

Finally, she started to focus her energy on drawing.

While in AA she became pregnant with her daughter, Emily, with her then-husband, whom she left before the baby was born. She soon remarried and the couple had a daughter, Casey, in 1999.

She continued drawing, studying in Sacramento State's graduate program. She met art professor Chris Daubert, who gave her a show at the Kondos Gallery.

Daubert says he saw potential in how Murphy-Robinson challenged herself. "I don't see any end point to her continued growth," he said. "But it's coming on its own. I know so many artists who keep on thinking that, you know, the marketing is probably as important as the work. And she has it the other way around."

In 2002, she met the late charcoal artist, Troy Dalton, who died from his own addictions to alcohol, drugs and food in 2010. The two drew alongside each other.

Dalton introduced her to the charcoal sanding technique she's used since. The approach involves sanding the paper to draw onto the raw material, then alternating between applying and removing the charcoal, so it's embedded into the paper's fibers. The result is a rich, tonal range allowing for nuanced representation.

Murphy-Robinson says it represented a huge step in her journey toward photorealism.

Her journey has taken other, deeper turns, too.

As she grew as an artist, Murphy-Robinson started to confront her hectic teenage years in autobiographical works depicted through her daughters. She imbues in the portraits a spirit of self confidence that evaded her early life. "I'm trying to give them what I didn't have myself," she said.

Now, she wants to continue to seek different forms for her art. "I want to experiment, I want to up the bar. I want to draw something that is hard or harder," she said. "Everything's in flux."



Learn more about Annie Murphy-Robinson's art: facebook.com/AnnieMurphyRobinsonArt.