

His and Hers

Longtime married couple Barbara and Robert Barrett finally find the time to have their first joint art show since college.

BY DANIEL VAILLANCOURT

■ “People — even handymen — come to the house and tell us, ‘You should have a show!’” chuckles Barbara Barrett as I sit with her and her husband, Robert, in the comfortable living room of their well-appointed country club home, which is festooned with art created — and keepsakes collected — over more than 50 years together. “So we’re finally doing it. We have the time now. We don’t have to worry about other things. We can focus.”

She’s speaking of *Barbara Barrett Transcendentals/Robert Barrett Seven Deadly Sins: A Survey of Paintings and Drawings*, the joint exhibition the couple will present at a specially designated gallery at Rancho Mirage’s retail-dining-entertainment complex The River from Oct. 17 through Nov. 25.

The twosome, both 71 — she’s from the San Joaquin Valley town of Coalinga; he was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and raised in Iran and Italy — met as students at Oakland’s California College of the Arts in 1966 and have been together ever since. “While in art school, we imagined we would live the life of artists and teachers,” says Robert. “But it troubled me to not have a real job — a nine-to-five job with benefits, vacation, and a salary that would afford us the life I wanted to give Barbara.” And so, he built a distinguished career, highlights of which include serving as a municipal

art manager, a contemporary art museum director, and — most notably — a cultural tourism advertising executive whose pioneering efforts as Senior Vice President of Marketing for the Convention & Visitors Bureau of Los Angeles led the city to become regarded as one of the great multicultural capitals of the 21st century. Robert’s first retirement in 2007, which permitted the Barretts to retreat to the desert from Pasadena, was suspended when he became Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the City of Rancho Mirage, a post vacated in May 2016.

Barbara, too, worked long and hard. Not only did she help raise son Max, 40, and care for all four of the pair’s ailing parents, she worked in fields as varied as graphic art, teaching, academic and nonprofit administration, and special events and marketing. All this in addition to creating art nonstop — some 3,000 pieces total — the majority of which are in private and public collections, including a dozen large livestock “portraits” owned by Fujico Beef Company in Nagoya, Japan.

“Barbara, for some reason, had more energy than I did,” says Robert by way of explaining why he only recently completed his series of seven large-scale tableaux begun in the mid-’90s. “She could go home, breathe deeply, and go into the studio. I just couldn’t. I didn’t have

Left to right: Barbara and Robert Barrett circa 1970s and today. Below: *Seduction*, 1999 by Barbara Barrett. Prismacolor on ecru Canson Mi-Teintes paper. 19 1/2" x 25 1/5"



Right, Mark Davidson; opposite from top left, Courtesy of Barbara and Robert Barrett; David A. Lee.



BARBARA BARRETT
 TRANSCENDENTALS/
 ROBERT BARRETT SEVEN
 DEADLY SINS: A SURVEY OF
 PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS

The River in Rancho Mirage, Suite A-161

OCT. 17 - NOV. 25, 2017
 Sunday-Thursday, 4-8 p.m.,
 Friday & Saturday, 2-8 p.m.

OPENING RECEPTION
 Monday, Oct. 16, 5-7 p.m.

ARTIST DISCUSSION
 Wednesday, Oct. 25, 7 p.m.



Top to bottom:
 Barbara and Robert Barrett
 circa 1970s and today.
 Opposite page:
 Anger, 2017 by Robert Barrett.
 Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48"

the strength. For me, making art is like dragging a chain with a 1,000-pound ball at the end of it. Barbara makes art like a child. Or Picasso. It just flows out of her like hot lava." Barbara says simply: "It's a biological thing."

The show consists of Robert's aforementioned elegies to mortal transgressions alongside 26 works from Barbara's "Goddesses and the Mask" series. The couple's creations — none of which has been previously shown — are loosely linked by the theme of good and evil and will hang comingled rather than separately. "My work is about truth, beauty, and goodness," says Barbara. "It's an expression of my female perception, both of history and of my personal life." Robert adds: "Mine is

a musing, during my mature adult years, about the issue of sin, or missing the mark, in relation to myself and the world in which I live."

Asked which example of the other's oeuvre each favors, Robert says, "If I wanted to keep just one — simply because I would always be thinking about it and missing it — it would be the drawing of all the roses and the two frogs. That was one of Barbara's early drawings from that set, and it's always just stunned me."

"I like the image of the heart and the birds," says Barbara, referring to Robert's piece titled *Anger*. "I love the visual beauty of the painting, the dark and the light. And birds are very spiritual for me. I like the color. But mainly, it's because it's the heart."



Mark Davidson