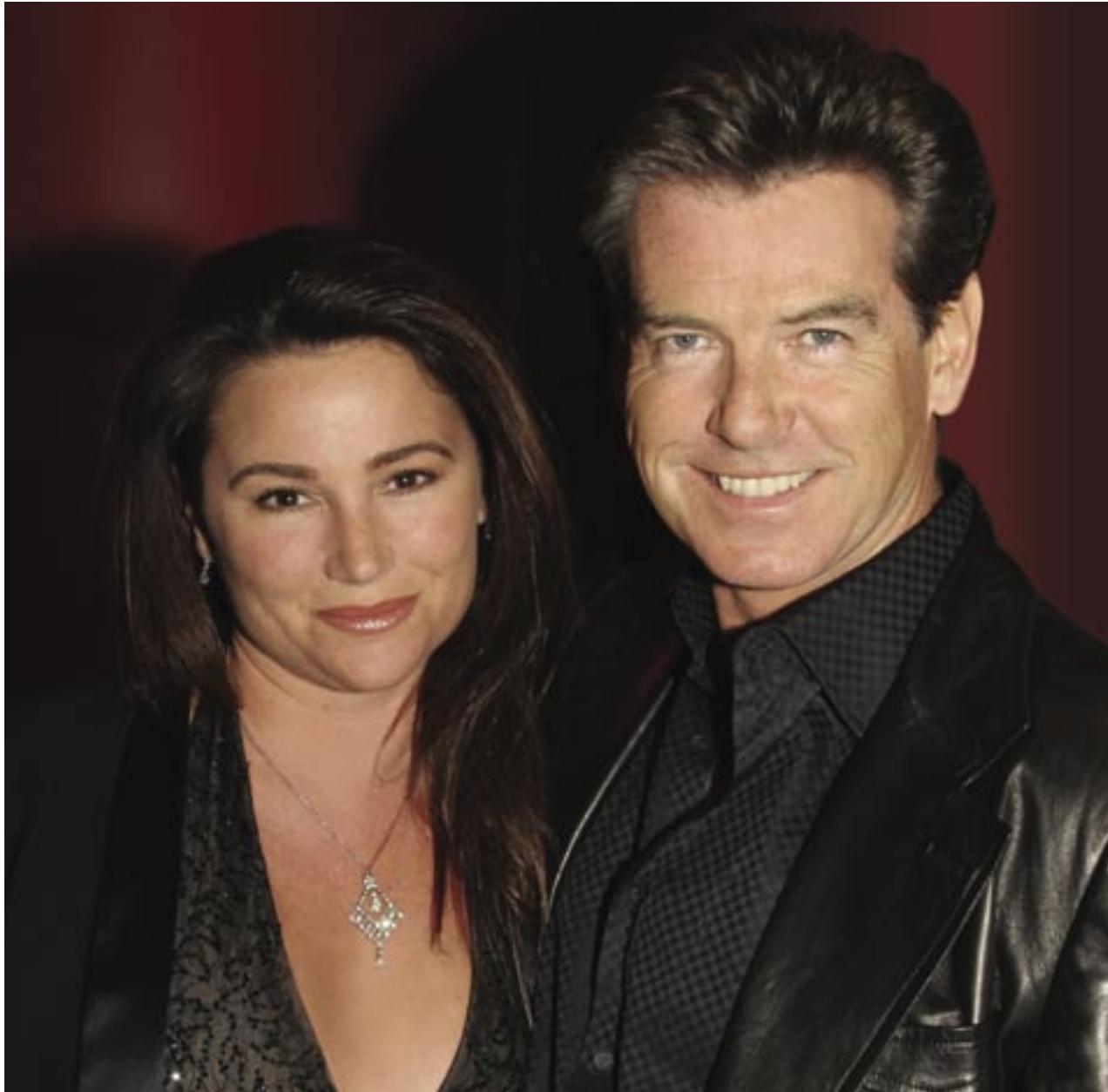


PRIVILEGE

Celebrating Philanthropy

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Fredric Roberts at the Peter Fetterman Gallery opening of his show

In Search of a Rich Life

A FORMER BANKER TRADES HIGH FINANCE FOR REAL WEALTH

Fredric Roberts smiles. “I’m the luckiest guy in the world. I love what I’m doing.”

A robust man with palpable *joie de vivre*, Roberts is on a roll. The Brentwood resident has spent the past several years on photographic adventures in far flung areas of Asia. At the recent opening of a show of his work at the Peter Fetterman Gallery in Bergamot Station in Santa Monica, his evocative photographs taken in homes and villages and temples were selling briskly at \$1,500 and \$3,000 each. His first book has just been published. And the gallery opening was an outing for one of his favorite causes, the Fraternity of Friends of the Music Center.

“It was a very successful opening,” says gallery owner Fetterman. “We had a lot of people here. We sold 27 prints. Most people just schmooze at openings, so that number is pretty high. It’s good that they were moved by the images.”

Photography is Roberts’ second career. His first couldn’t have been more different, 30 years as a high flyer in the finance industry. Before establishing his own investment bank, F. M. Roberts & Company, Inc. in Los Angeles in 1980, Roberts was a corporate finance executive at Lehman Brothers, vice president of corporate finance at Loeb, Rhoades & Co., vice president of corporate finance at E.F. Hutton & Co. and director of corporate finance at Cantor, Fitzgerald & Co., Inc. He has served as chairman of the National Association of Securities Dealers, which operates the NASDAQ stock exchange, and on the NASDAQ board.

He has brought his business expertise into L.A. philanthropy, serving as a member of the Board of Directors and a member of the Audit, Budget and Finance Committee and Strategic Planning Committee of the Los Angeles Music Center. He is also a former chairman of the Fraternity of Friends and founding chairman of the Music Center Education Division’s Spotlight Awards program.

Roberts' escapes from the corporate world into art began more than 20 years ago, when he bought a Canon-T90 camera and flew off to Thailand, China and Tibet. Far from an experienced or sophisticated photographer, he read the manual on the plane. "A very thick manual," he quickly discovered.

With his Walkman, he listened to opera on Asian beaches while reading the librettos. He took photographs. Hundreds of photographs. And he had an epiphany. "I said to myself, 'My business is all about money. The wonderful, classy people I know in the business are retiring. I hate this, and I want to quit. I have enough money.'"

On his return home, Roberts found that people were enthusiastic about his photographs. He signed up for a course through UCLA Extension taught by two National Geographic photographers. One of them told him he had talent and encouraged him to pursue his interest in the field.

But this first attempt to transform his life came to an abrupt end. A bad business deal cost him nearly everything he had earned. "I dug in and saved everybody else's money," Roberts says of that time, but he was not able to recover his own funds. He had to shelve the camera and return to investment banking, a period that lasted 14 years.

By 2000, he had amassed what he needed and was once again ready to walk. "I was called an 'artist' in my work," Roberts says of his dealings in the financial sector. "I got record breaking premiums for my clients." But he was not content. He gradually reduced business at his bank. "I ran it down to zero," he says, "to be able to get away."

"Susan Sontag wrote that a camera is a weapon that distances you from the people you're with. I found it to be a conduit that enhanced my insight."

Roberts still owns F. M. Roberts, but describes it as "non-functioning." He is still on three corporate boards—PCA International, a large operator of portrait studios, Cost Plus, Inc. and Limited Too, a specialty retailer of girls' apparel. He advises another investment bank, but says he has not actively done deals in his own name for five years.

When he was once again ready to immerse himself in photography, he enrolled in a workshop in Santa Fe and bought a new camera. "I found this new person living inside me," Roberts says of the impact of the class. "I connected."

In the last five years, Roberts has travelled to India, Cambodia, Bhutan, Thailand, Myanmar and China, capturing evocative, colorful images that seem to illuminate the inner lives of his subjects. He prefers making these trips with his girlfriend to joining organized groups.

"You have to spend time with people, care about them, to really shoot them," he says. "It's interesting what a camera does. Susan Sontag wrote that a camera is a weapon that distances you from the people you're with. I found it to be a conduit that enhanced my insight."

He has plunged into his new career with the same zeal he put into business and philanthropy. His photographs are in the collections of Stanford University and the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego. He has won in two categories of the International Photography Awards. He is an officer or member of several photographic arts organizations including the President's Circle and Photographic Arts Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Shwe Yan Pyay Monks, top, and Courtyard Women, by Fredric Roberts



Descent from Golden Rock by Fredric Roberts

At the Fetterman opening, which was sponsored by City National Bank and also benefited the Blue Ribbon, Music Center supporters Kent and Joyce Kresa bought a photograph within moments of entering.

Kent Kresa, chairman emeritus of Northrop Grumman, knows Roberts through the Music Center. “We have both been on the board for many years,” he says. “I purchased one of his photographs at the opening, a lovely picture of a woman in blue against a white building. My wife loved it. We were struck by how good it was. It’s been such a career change for Fred. Not just a hobby, but a career.”

“I think Fred’s photography is extraordinary,” says John Emerson, chairman of the Music Center board. “I gave his book to President Clinton last week. I thought he would enjoy it as he had just returned from that part of the world.”

“There was no material wealth there [in Vietnam], but many people with very rich lives.”

Many of the photographs in Roberts’ book, *Humanitas*, were taken in areas that were later devastated by the tsunamis. The publisher, Hylas Press, is donating a portion of the proceeds to tsunami relief. In addition, Cost Plus, where Roberts is a director, has purchased a large number of copies and will donate its profits.

Roberts dedicated the book, “To Paul, my father, who has always been happy with what he has.”

The theme of Roberts' book, which clearly resonates with his own discoveries, presented itself to him in Vietnam. "I was talking to a head monk," he says. "He invited me in for tea, and he said, 'You're lucky. You Americans are so rich. We Vietnamese are so poor.'

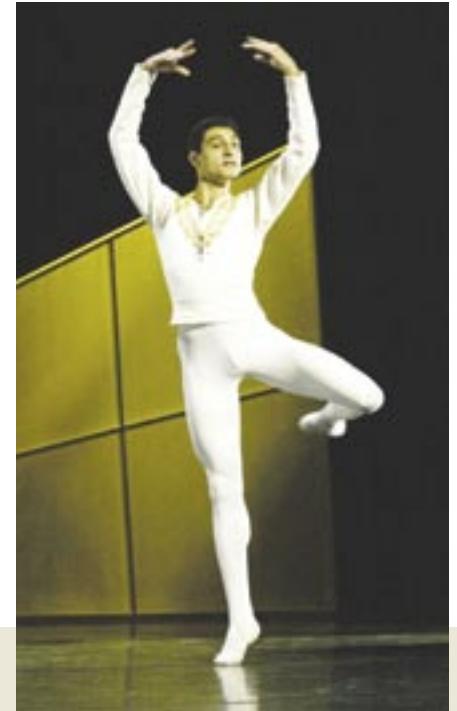
"I was surprised to hear him say that. I saw many happy, if poor, families there. Cohesive families. There was no material wealth there, but many people with very rich lives.

"Many people here are spiritually bereft. This book is about those people in Vietnam. You can have a rich life. It is not measured in money." ■

Chris Rubin is a Los Angeles freelance writer, covering lifestyle and culture for several publications.



Fred Roberts and Joyce and Kent Kresa at gallery opening



2004 winner Gregory Arakelian

Rising Stars

When the 12 Music Center Spotlight Awards finalists take to the vast stage of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on April 16, some of the country's future stars will be in the limelight and some of the program's oldest friends will be watching.

Founding Spotlight chairman Fredric Roberts stepped down two years ago after 17 years at the helm, but is still a member of the Spotlight board and a judge in the photography category.

The awards recognize talented high school students in six performance categories: classical voice, and instrumental and ballet and non-classical voice and dance and jazz instrumental. Finalists perform at the annual gala and receive scholarships.

The winners in the visual arts categories, photography and two-dimensional design, will see their work displayed at the Bobbie Greenfield Gallery in Bergamot Station and be guests at a reception there on April 13.

It was Roberts who added the visual arts to the performance arts component of the program eight years ago. The whole program is close to his heart. "I became aware of Spotlight in 1988," he says. "It was going to be a one time only event. The Music Center came to me and asked if I thought it had legs.

"I said yes. Here was a way to go to high school students at their most impressionable stage, to do something profound. To say to kids, it's okay to be a violin hero or tap-dance hero."

The competition begins in the summer when applications go out to all Southern California public and private high schools, art schools and private teachers. Student applicants then take part in regional auditions judged by professionals in their discipline. By December, the field is down to 15 semifinalists in each category.

From January until March, semi-finalists audition before another panel of expert judges and two finalists in each category are chosen. Winners receive \$6,000 scholarships; runners up are awarded \$3,000.

In the 17 years since its inception, nine finalists have become Presidential Scholars, four have made professional operatic debuts, three have made Broadway debuts and four have performed at Carnegie Hall.

However, all participants gain something from the Spotlight program. The 700 students who auditioned but did not make the semi-finals receive personal letters to help them identify their artistic strengths and areas for further development. Semi-finalists are invited to master classes with professionals in their art. The 300 students who submitted visual arts entries receive professional evaluations from the judges.

Allan Burns is the 2005 Spotlight chairman. Paula Abdul will host the awards. Bank of America sponsors the event and Peter and Helen Bing underwrite the monetary awards. Tickets are \$300 per person. For information call the Fraternity of Friends office at (213) 972-3346.