



Through the Lens

KATHRYN MCCARVER ROOT'S WASHINGTON GALLERY

BY | JOSEPH MONTEBELLO

TALL, WILLOWY, with a mane of streaked dark-blond hair, Kathryn McCarver Root would be at home on any fashion runway. But this Southern belle, exuding a native charm, is the owner of the successful KMR Arts Gallery in Washington

Depot. "It was actually my husband's idea," Root says. "We had been living in New York and I had a great job as senior photo editor at *InStyle*. We had moved to Roxbury with our children and it just wasn't realistic to commute every day. A space became

available, and he said now you can have your gallery. Of course, I'd never worked in a gallery and I had never mentioned wanting to have one." But it happened anyway.

KMR Arts has been open since 2007. "I did a group show first so I could spot-

light several photographers at one time, both vintage and contemporary, with different themes and different price points. And also get a feel for who my customer would be and what their interests were," says Root.

Originally from Memphis, Root moved around a lot as a child. Her father, Tim McCarver, was a professional baseball player and the family traveled with him. After graduation from college in Virginia, she moved to New York and interned at *Esquire*, which led to a full-time job in the art department and working with the photo editor. "There was this amazing collection of photography books and I started learning about pictures and it piqued my interest," Root says. Eventually she went to work for a small book packager where she worked on monographs, including one on Lillian Bassman.

"I was in awe of her, her work, her spirit, her fearlessness as an artist, a photographer, and as a woman. I always felt privileged to work on the book and the FIT exhibition," Root says. When the gallery opened, Bassman was on Root's wish list. "I didn't know her all that well, but I called her studio and before I could finish the sentence asking if she would consider a show in Washington Depot, she said yes."

Bassman was Root's first one-person show and established KMR Arts as

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“Photography is a great medium because it’s totally democratic. While the contemporary-art market was going through its ups and downs, photography has had a gradual progression of acceptability and accessibility. For a not-crazy amount of money, you can get a

to the artist. Vintage prints are those that were made within two years of when the photo was taken.”

The newest controversy has been the introduction of digital photos. “Digital has changed the market,” Root says. In the area of fine art, I tend to be a little more skeptical of digital photos. It’s still such a young format; some pretty



great piece of photography and put together a respectable collection,” says Root.

Unlike paintings and sculpture, photography allows several prints to be made from the same negative, which has always sparked controversy about the value of a print. “In theory, yes, if the negative exists, an infinite number of prints can be made. In practice, that doesn’t happen,” Root explains. “A photographer makes X number of prints and then doesn’t print anymore. If there is a reprint, so many factors come into play: the type of paper, the type of darkroom process, the signature, the stamp, and the condition of the print. For me, what is key is how close the print is

amazing things can happen in a darkroom that can’t happen with a computer.”

Root mounts four to five shows a year. Recently, she had a show of works by Leo Fuchs, a Hollywood photographer who captured some of the most memorable images of ’40s and ’50s icons.

In May, Root will show work by Sandi Fellman. “Sandi was in my first show. Her sepia-toned flowers border on abstraction and there is a beautiful play of light and shadow. We’ll have some of the flowers as well as some of her recent work. The new ones are color and are the first of her work to be shot digitally.” Fellman’s photographs are in the permanent collections of several important museums.



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