

# Bartleby Snopes



A Literary Magazine

## Robin's Installation

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by Rick Neumayer

**R**obin Parker-Sims had a ladybug tattoo on her chest and a barbwire arm band tattoo above her left elbow. If she'd put half as much energy into her art work as her appearance, she'd have been a lot further along by now than merely being our co-op art gallery's only non-dues paying member. I felt she wasn't serious about art and would've weeded her out long ago, if it had been up to me. But our other members wanted more young people involved in the gallery, and someone had to hang the shows and keep the gallery clean. Ironically, after her pretentious little installation had been damaged during the opening reception, Robin came up to me.

"Thanks for helping, Audrey. This might've been a total loss otherwise."

As if it could have been anything else!

Robin was about twenty-two, short, neither fat nor thin, and always the Goth look--black clothing, boots with tall soles and heels, dark hair in a bob with bangs, blinding red lipstick, gobs of eye makeup. She worked only part-time at her coffee shop job, and never had enough money. She always seemed prickly and uncommunicative, my helpful comments falling upon deaf ears.

I had no love for my fellow co-op member, Gladys Larsen, either, not only because she'd supported the installation, but also because I'd overheard her referring to my still life paintings as "competent but clichéd." Clearly, the woman lacked appreciation for the long classic tradition. How could anyone prefer Robin's bizarre exhibition to my water colors of lilies? I didn't like being spiteful and vindictive, yet such a cutting remark was not easily forgiven. A ceramics artist originally from London (and so proud of it), Gladys always dressed elegantly, but she was sixty-five and looked it. It was her tweedy balding Scandinavian husband Glenn, a librarian, whom I'd accused of ruining Robin's tampon installation.

Tampons! I'm not unsophisticated, but really!

Despite our personnel problems, this was a wonderful gallery. To me, it always seemed to glow and gleam because of its white walls, light wood floors, and high ceilings. There was a door at the

far end, usually left open, where beautiful glass objects caught the light. During openings, small groups tended to congregate in that area. I assumed this was why Robin had chosen it for her installation, though she never confided in me.

The installation was a six by six sculpture consisting of five hundred spray-painted tampons attached by six-pound test monofilament fishing line to the ceiling. It was not meant to be interactive, as any fool could see from the "do not touch" sign on the wall, but it was still tempting to move the tampons around and that's exactly what Glenn Larsen had done. I knew; I'd seen him. Perhaps he'd really rather have pawed Robin, considering how his wife was so up in age.

All of us in the gallery started getting emails about the situation.

Delicious.

Earlier, when Robin was getting ready to hang the show, she'd asked everyone if they knew where a tall ladder might be found because of the gallery's high ceiling. After attaching the strings of the tampons--all shades of gray--to long thin threads, she had to climb up and pin them to the ceiling. When she finished, they all swayed as you walked by.

When the installation was damaged, Robin contended (or so I came to discover, the negotiations being conducted behind closed doors) that part of her loss was due to the extensive labor expended just to hang the installation:

"The arrangement couldn't look messy. The tampons couldn't touch each other, but they still had to move slightly without getting tangled up. The threads all had to be cut almost the same length, but not exactly, in order to get the sensuous swing effect I wanted."

I'm sure that after putting her arms up for such a long time, Robin got really tired, poor thing. Probably, some of the pins wouldn't hold and the tampons fell. I could imagine her having to climb down and pick them up, then climb back up and do it all over again.

Robin's artist statement referred to the repetition of shape and the beauty of monotony. How seeing the same thing over and over again has a ritualistic attraction. But they were tampons, for God sake! You could put two-thousand of them up there and they'd still be tampons.

Robin contended that when Glenn Larsen had touched the hanging tampons, he'd tangled them up so badly the mess could never be undone. She demanded that he pay for the damage:

"My work was destroyed. I need to be compensated. I worked hard on the installation, and what does that say about the gallery if it can't even protect its own members?"

This was all very public, as the emails started zinging back and forth. That's how I knew what was going on. I was surprised when our executive director Dan Romano, another professorial man, said he'd like to discuss the matter with me.

"Of course," I said. "I've heard the criticism going around that you were being too heavy-handed, but I was shocked because I think you've done a wonderful job. With over twenty gallery members, being in charge must be a terrible responsibility."

He agreed that, indeed, it was. After alluding to my well-known tact and discretion, he told me negotiations over compensating Robin had run into a snag.

"Glenn claims that he didn't cause all the damage," Dan said.

"But I thought he'd admitted as much."

"While he admits touching the installation and perhaps unintentionally tangling up a couple of threads, he contends that the twisted mess Robin found afterward was someone else's fault."

"Whose?" I said.

"I was hoping you might be able to help with me with that."

"Me? Why?"

"Only that, as you were the one who saw him do it, I wondered if you'd noticed anyone else batting it around?"

"Certainly not! otherwise, I'd have said so. I resent the implication, Dan."

"No implication intended."

"The only person I saw was Gladys Larsen's husband. He was batting it around like a cat who can't keep his paws to himself."

"Well, you know how it is in a situation like this," Dan said. "There's a substantial amount of money being demanded. I'm an artist, not a detective, but I have to ask everyone who might've seen something. I know you're observant. That's why I asked. Thank you for your help."

Not long after this, at a meeting where I expected further discussion, Dan announced that the matter had been settled privately. Gladys was at that meeting and remained silent, which I found both appropriate and gratifying.

"Let's not talk about it anymore," Dan said.

And so it was all taken care of, and never spoken of since--openly, although the gossip was that the Larsens had paid a substantial sum in damages to Robin. I told Gladys how sorry I was, and do you know she gave me such an odd look, as if to question my sincerity. But she wouldn't dare accuse me.

The installation turned out to be Robin's last show. She left the gallery soon after, taking her tangled tampons with her, surely not because of this incident, but rather to live in Toronto, where she claimed there was an amazing independent art scene--and presumably everyone was tattooed.

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BIO: **Rick Neumayer**, who would never deliberately sabotage someone's art work, is a native of Louisville, Kentucky, and a student in Spalding University's MFA in Writing Program. He has published short fiction in such journals as *The Louisville Review* and *New Southerner*, and has had three Broadway-style original musicals produced at RiverStage in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Visit his web site at [RickNeumayer.com](http://RickNeumayer.com).