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*Someone You Should Know*


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# MAUREEN WATSON

*SANIBEL GALLERY OWNER SHARES THOUGHTS,  
LOVES WHAT SHE DOES, RELATES A BRIEF HISTORY*

**M**aureen Watson is the founder of the Watson MacRae Gallery on Sanibel. Considered one of the finer galleries in Southwest Florida, Watson MacRae opened in 2008 in the Village Shops on Periwinkle Way. Gallery artwork is quirky and cool, which is how many islanders describe Watson, an edgy New Yorker with a heart of gold.

#### MY HOMETOWN NEIGHBORHOOD

is one of those small towns on the “East End” of Long Island before it became the “The Hamptons.” My neighborhood was the ocean, the bay and the “crick” that ran behind our house. I was a kid of the ’50s, so we rode bikes everywhere, took the bus to the beach and the train to New York City. Since both my parents had their own businesses, I worked from the time I was 10 when my father opened his restaurant—first in the kitchen, then at 12, I was allowed to wait tables. I was hooked. I loved the art of business.

**MY CAREER PATH** after graduating with a degree in mathematics led to a job with IBM as a programmer when computers that now power a watch were as big as a family great room. I then worked for Xerox, Citibank in New York City and finally discovered the training and development industry, which was in its infancy. My career was a synchronistic series of roads taken and not taken. Along the way I sold Xerox equipment door to door in New York’s jewelry district, founded a \$3-million consulting company in NYC, studied with Jean Houston at her Mystery School, drove cross-country for four months interviewing women who had changed their lives by following their intuition, lived three days in Cincinnati, studied painting at New York Studio School, cofounded a painting school in Naples, Florida, with Hollis Jeffcoat and opened a fine art gallery on Sanibel.



MAUREEN WATSON

**DESPITE THE** fact that I was a woman working in the “Mad Men” world of the ’70s, I succeeded, but only because I started my own business. Armed with a type-A personality and with non-traditional parental role models—a mother who owned her own business and a father who believed women to be the superior sex and referred to himself as the “First Feminist”—I started my first business in 1987.

**COMING TO FLORIDA** was a family road trip when I was 5. It was even better than the beach at home. The balmy breezes, shells and the palm trees made Florida exotic. And I’m not surprised to find myself back here.

**WHEN I** started my gallery in 2008, it was based on the idea that “beauty heals.” I thought if beauty heals, then beautiful art, not necessarily pretty, must heal, as well.

With that intention, I looked for artists whose work was imbued with a certain energy or feeling or spirit—art that heals. Incidentally, several recent studies have shown this to be true. When someone brings a piece of original art into their home, this energy permeates the space. Not all work has this—work made strictly from an artist’s head, “decorative” work and giclées, for example. But for artwork that does, it has a palpable presence and adds not only to the beauty and ambience of a home, but also to the harmony, the positive “vibe.” Since opening, I have expanded the gallery space, as well as what I offer. In the gallery you will find fine art—paintings, prints and sculpture and fine crafts in fiber, ceramics and glass.

**I TRAVEL** all over the country and the Internet to find work that is very high quality, unusual and has soul. Each month during season I have a new themed exhibit with a festive opening and artists’ talks. In January, for example, work from five artists I discovered this summer in Santa Fe were in the exhibit “From Santa Fe with Love.”



Watson MacRae Gallery

**IT HAS BEEN** a surprising and rewarding experience to have the gallery on Sanibel. Artwork has gone to all parts of the country and various parts of the world. Recently, it was referred to as an “island asset.” I am grateful to be part of a vibrant, inquiring community and to add to the cultural fiber of the islands.

**SUCCESSFUL AS** I am, I’m continually looking for how the gallery can be of service. I think about what people are having trouble with and how we can help. Merging art collections, rehanging paintings, choosing colors for repainting, wrapping and shipping artwork so it arrives safely . . . problems. These are the areas that the new Watson

MacRae Art Services are helping with—and it’s fun.

**WHEN I STARTED** my first company, I would talk to people—at the time, men—who owned businesses and ask them, “What are the three things I need to know to be successful?” A summary of their responses was: (1) keep your overhead low; (2) keep your overhead low; and (3) know the business you’re getting into. That is still the advice I would give, and I would add: Really love what you do.

**LIFE IS** always complicated. It’s how you move through it that makes it difficult or easier. 🐠