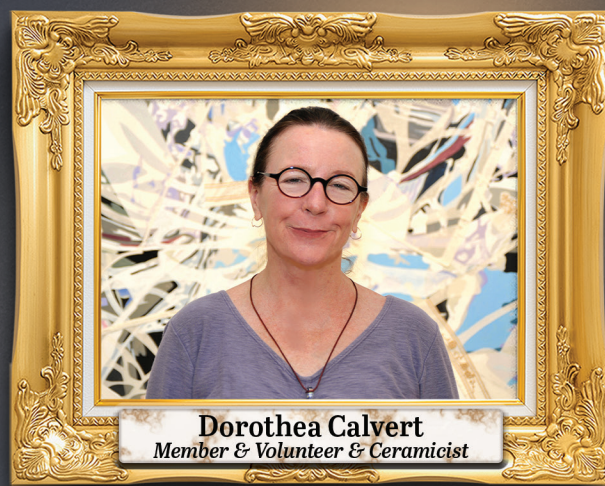


# KINSEY ROBB



**Dorothea Calvert**  
Member & Volunteer & Ceramicist



**Brenda Hadjian**  
Member & Volunteer & Watercolor Artist



**Linda Jager**  
Admin & Memberships



**Nancy Goff**  
Member & Volunteer & Teaching Artist



**Elizabeth Goodwill**  
Education Director



**Andrew Long**  
Exhibitions Coordinator



**S**he's the new Executive Director of Art Center Sarasota, an organization created in 1926. Kinsey worked in the commercial side of the art world at some of the largest and most prominent art galleries in large cities around the world. Despite all that commerce and big city life, she found, "I have a real passion for the nonprofit side," adding, "but the commercial world gave me a great education." She adds, "I've been visiting this area since my childhood and have always been struck by the depth and quality of the regional arts and cultural landscape."

**I**t's a bit removed from Gagosian Gallery (an international art gallery), Lehman Maupin (a contemporary gallery space in New York City), and Perrotin (also an international art gallery). Yet, here she is, the Executive Director of Art Center Sarasota, an organization created in 1926. So the question is...why? Or, what made you decide to take this position?

But before that, a question I've been asking businesses and nonprofits since early 2020: how did your organization cope with the pandemic? The Art Center, simply put, had to cancel classes and exhibits. If you know their space, it is charmingly intimate, but that's not so great with a pandemic. Classes, exhibits and the resultant art sales were the lifeblood of the Center and it all came to a halt.

Fortunately, The Gulf Coast Community Foundation stepped in and helped them through their "Invest in Incredible" program. Lisa Berger, the Center's Executive Director for eight years, left in 2020 to work with another arts organization. The board was left with a search for a leader to not only carry them out of COVID, but to take Art Center Sarasota to a higher level in a vibrant, but very competitive arts community in Sarasota.

Enter Kinsey who worked in the commercial side of the art world at some of the largest and most prominent art galleries in large cities around the world. Gagosian, for example, has 16 locations and represents many well known artists such as Damien Hirst.

Before working, Kinsey was in academia earning a BFA from Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts, where she majored in art photography and art history. That was followed by graduate study in art history at The University of Manchester, England.

From there she worked at Gagosian after working at a smaller gallery.

Despite all that commerce and big city life, she found, "I have a real passion for the nonprofit side," adding, "but the commercial world gave me a great education."

Her gallery jobs involved lots of travel, meetings and programming. When the "biggies" (galleries) as she calls them, started "digging into educational programming," she recalls thinking, "that appealed to me."

In New York, Kinsey was, like so many, working remotely, so she came to Sarasota to continue her work as New York experienced a major, sustained COVID outbreak. She arrived here April, 2020, after tracking COVID since October, 2019. Artist friends around the world also kept her up to speed. She made a trip in January, 2020, to LA then Boston then New York which was shutting down. She came to Sarasota after that and didn't go back.

She has a Sarasota connection that many know — her family lived in Sarasota. In fact, she came to Sarasota as a child and even further back, "in the womb," as she notes. Going further back, her grandparents had retired to Longboat Key in the late 1970s. Having returned again under challenging circumstances, she recalls thinking, "here's a place where I can make an actual impact."

The pivot to the Executive Director was when a recruiter told her about the job opening at Art Center Sarasota. "I wanted another challenge - taking on a nonprofit. I wanted to take those for-profit skills and use them." For her, "It was too tempting not to take."

Kinsey liked the projects going on in Sarasota, too, like The Bay going on behind the Art Center. What she saw here was "an environment that fosters creativity," noting that, "the arts are more integrated here." She also observed the numerous number of nonprofits here as well as wealthy and generous philanthropists who support them. The career change she feels, "gave me a break from New York City" or the "hamster wheel" as she calls it. Kinsey started at the Center officially in May, 2021.

Kinsey praises her board whom she calls, "so supportive" because they understood the risks

that the Art Center had to face with COVID, adding, "they had it together," even while making the tough call to shut down which Kinsey recalls as, "a painful experience."

Art classes shifted to virtual with very limited in-person, exhibits were installed, videoed then uploaded to YouTube. "Be flexible and have foresight," was what guided her thinking. The Center followed CDC and Sarasota DOH recommendations, "and we exceeded the minimum of what we needed to do."

The Center capitalized on their sculpture garden, using it as an indoor/outdoor space. Going forward, they're using it for garden parties for their gallery openings, adding tables and chairs and maybe food trucks as nicer weather approaches.

Kinsey is excited about The Art Center's upcoming season with its Seven Cycles spread out over four galleries. One will always be a local juried exhibit which offers area artists the opportunity to be seen. The Center doesn't "rep" or "manage" artists (which she would be wildly over-qualified for if they did).

Collaboration is important to her, too, something she feels is "essential." Already Art Center Sarasota has partnered with The Hermitage and this past October the Players of Sarasota utilized their space for a show.

One of the things Kinsey feels the public doesn't know about Art Center Sarasota is that you can purchase artwork from the exhibits. They're affordable and beautiful pieces. They're diverse, some have a tropical or local theme while others are abstractions. Monies raised go to the artists, but a portion also supports the Art Center.

Kinsey's business mind wonders why the Center is not better known. Do people think it's a private facility, a "member's only" type of place? It was member-based, but changed to member-supported, she explains. But to answer the question, it's not a private organization, not exclusive. "The remedy (to those falsehoods) is collaboration," she explains. "We are a free and open space."

The Center's online presence has also grown more sophisticated. "We're growing... our research shows that in our social media, on our website. It's also staff and board doing advocacy."

Any thoughts to moving the Center as some organizations have done or would like to do? No, The Center is "rooted" in the heart of the historical district and "firmly-planted," she explains. Expanding on their existing space is a possibility.

Kinsey attends Sarasota Bay meetings, a project she feels is all about revisioning — "bringing the last century into the next," something the Art Center will also be doing. Currently, The Art Center (from their website) "offers more than 25 exhibitions annually, year-round classes for kids and adults, and collaborative programming with artists, performers, and arts groups."

Outreach, collaboration, revisioning, they're her "buzz" words. "Sarasota is eclectic (said by someone from the big apple)" and she adds about her own Art Center, "I want it to survive another 100 years...survive, but also thrive."

From the Art Center blog, Carolyn Benedict-Drew, Chair of the Board of Directors, wrote, "she [Kinsey] will work with ACS leadership to develop a strategic plan that will lead us boldly into the future." Carolyn describes Kinsey this way, "Her work is her passion."

"I've been visiting this area since my childhood and have always been struck by the depth and quality of the regional arts and cultural landscape. I'm honored to now be a part of it."

✎ STORY: Louise Bruderle  
✎ IMAGES: Evelyn England

► **The Annual Art Center Sarasota Instructors & students Invitation Exhibition** opens **Nov. 4 from 6-8pm** with beverages served in the garden. See the current work of over 25 instructors and their students **on view November 4 - November 27.** <https://www.artsarasota.org/>