

# Iowa

Leslie Roberts

*Brooklyn Room 2*

September 27 - November 8, 2026

Iowa is pleased to present *Brooklyn Room 2*, an exhibition of works by Leslie Roberts. The exhibition revisits Roberts's September 1999 show at eyewash, an apartment gallery on North 7th St in Williamsburg run by artist Larry Walczak (1950-2023) and curator and gallerist Annie Herron (1954-2004) from 1997 through 2002. Situated in a 19th-century tenement apartment, eyewash was divided into three exhibition spaces; Roberts's show *Brooklyn Room* took over the former living room. Prior to the gallery's occupancy, the apartment had been empty and unrenovated for twenty years. Walczak and Herron left the space largely as it was, retaining its time-weathered character. The old-fashioned woodwork, paint-splattered wooden floors, and chipped ornamental fireplace recalled for Roberts the patinaed apartments she lived in when she first moved to Brooklyn in 1980 in her early twenties. She worked in the space for three weeks ahead of the show, those years on her mind; by the last week she had practically moved in, the domestic setting taking on new meaning.

From 1995 to 2004, Roberts used puzzles as substrates for her paintings, their pre-fabricated compositions introducing conditions for studying form, color, and structure. At first working with blank puzzles, she eventually began to collect found puzzles from thrift and 99 cent stores, particularly those featuring female subjects like Minnie Mouse and Marilyn Monroe. The nostalgic imagery of these ready-mades was then obscured by selective applications of paint, abstracting their content and creating systems of framing. Postcard puzzles collected on trips to Italy juxtaposed the sublime with commodity culture, the Sistine Chapel peeking through from mostly blacked-out pieces. These repurposed surfaces generated a tension between purely formal concerns and those of a personal or cultural nature that continues to operate in Roberts's work today. *Brooklyn Room* presented a selection of these puzzle works, installed to emphasize the space's architecture: a small table found at a nearby thrift store refurnished the room and doubled as a pedestal for a monochromatic painting, its drawer open and filled with miscellaneous puzzle pieces; works were inset into the hearth and fireplace, using its recessed arch as a frame; and on the floor, vintage plastic placemats and sheets of linoleum were cut to form a large meandering puzzle, jutting out from a corner. On the furthest wall of the room, between its two windows, Roberts created an installation pieced together from five or six different puzzle sets, which crept up one edge of the wall and back down the other. In the puzzle's incomplete center, the wall was painted a spring green, evoking the transformation and rebirth of that moment in her life. The show's installation mirrored the puzzle works' negotiation between obscurity and meaning, the large room sparsely occupied but filled with memory.

*Brooklyn Room 2* is not a one-to-one recreation of the original exhibition, nor could it be. Iowa's space in Crown Heights has no mantels or fireplaces; our windows are perpendicular to each other instead of parallel. Limitations of scale reorient works into new relationships in the space; other works are no longer extant, lost to deinstallation or to studio moves later on. Puzzle paintings like *Marilyn*, though not originally shown at eyewash, are folded into the revisitation. Stretched across the past twenty-seven years, this show is an exercise in making peace with what can't be perfectly pieced together and in making visible the form of memory. We have found ways to frame, rather than obscure, these absences, and to honor the original exhibition, despite the differences between these two Brooklyn rooms. Roberts's work continues to balance structural decisions with the personal and even mundane; two recent paintings, in which the application of color and line are ruled by language from her day-to-day life, are hung in the living room.

Apartment galleries like eyewash or Iowa are often temporary because their conditions are difficult to sustain, particularly in cities like New York. Projects exist until they become cost prohibitive, pushed to evolve into new forms or eventually retire. We rely on archives and oral histories to keep them alive. Just as *Brooklyn Room* held the memories of all the former apartments that had witnessed Leslie Roberts, *Brooklyn Room 2* holds the memories of that show, eyewash, and everything that has taken place since.

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Leslie Roberts (b. 1957, Goldsboro, NC) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Roberts makes paintings driven by color, language, and self-devised rules. In 2024 she was awarded grants from the Pollock Krasner and Gottlieb Foundations. Recent solo and two-person shows include Studio Light Space (Tucson, AZ), 57W57Arts (New York, NY), Left Field Gallery (Los Osos, CA), Garrison Art Center (Garrison, NY), and Minus Space (Brooklyn, NY). Selected group shows include Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn, NY), Hafnarborg Museum (Hafnarfjörður, Iceland), Marlborough Gallery (New York, NY), and Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, NC). Residencies include Yaddo (Saratoga Springs, NY), Ucross (Ucross, WY), Dora Maar House (Ménerbes, FR), Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (Amherst, VA), Ragdale (Lake Forest, IL), Monson Arts (Monson, ME), and Skowhegan (Skowhegan, ME). CoMa Amsterdam/New York published a book on her work in 2024. Her work has been reviewed in Artforum and the Brooklyn Rail. She holds a BA from Yale University (New Haven, CT) and an MFA from Queens College (Queens, NY). She is professor emerita at Pratt Institute.