

PROFILE

Nobody quite like him

William Jamison has brought much richness to Portland's cultural life via art and activism

by Inga Sorensen

Many years ago when Peggy Flynn was a "fledgling fashion designer," she received a card containing a \$100 bill. That missive, signed by her friend William Jamison, read: "I totally believe in you."

Back in the 1970s, Joyce Lozito was driving from her Portland home to San Francisco when she picked up a hitchhiker who accompanied her on the 12-hour haul. "We fell in love with each other. We talked and talked and listened to music. When we got to San Francisco, we felt like we wanted to turn around so we could spend another 12 hours together," says Lozito, who is currently an arts instructor at the Metropolitan Learning Center. Lozito and that hitchhiker—William Jamison—would wind up sharing a friendship that would span two decades and eventually take them on shared journeys to exotic locations like Spain and Morocco.

Some years ago when Brad Rogers was a college student studying photography, he loved to unwind at a Rose City bistro called Victoria's Nephew: "That was back before the espresso boom. It was the only place that had an espresso bar, and it was just so great to go there and enjoy the atmosphere," says the thirtysomething Rogers, who readily admits that espresso was *not* the only thing he was interested in. It just so happened that William Jamison was a partner in Victoria's Nephew (the doors of which were open from 1974 to 1984). Last December, Rogers and Jamison celebrated their 13th anniversary together. "William is an angel," says Rogers.

As the saying goes: We should all be so lucky to have so many who love us. However, in the case of William Jamison, perhaps publicly best known for his Jamison/Thomas Gallery, friends and associates will assure you their feelings for Jamison have nothing to do with luck.

"Back in 1986 when I was thinking of opening my own gallery, I asked William for advice. He was not hesitant at all," says Rod Pulliam, co-owner of Portland's Pulliam/Deffenbaugh Gallery. "William is just so accessible and willing to respond to people's needs. He gave us advice even though we were a potential competitor. He is a natural teacher who never lectures."

Pulliam adds: "William really puts his money where his mouth is when it comes to the notion of 'community.'"

By the time Pulliam's space got up and running in 1988, Jamison's—and business partner Jeffrey Thomas'—Jamison/Thomas Gallery was already three years into creating a solid reputation

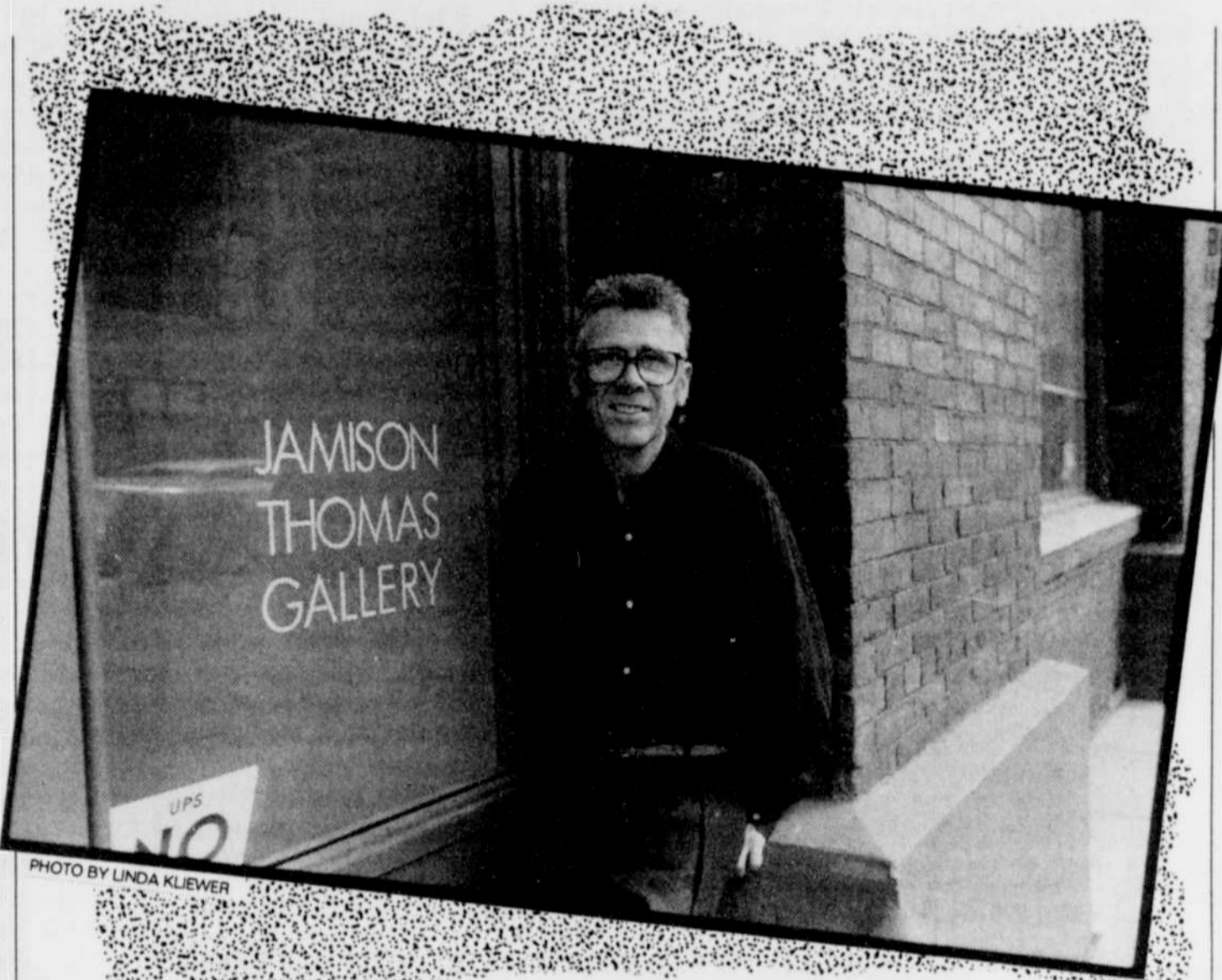


PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

for itself. (The Jamison/Thomas Gallery evolved from Jamison's Folk Craft Gallery, open from 1980 to 1985.)

During the past decade the gallery has featured Stan Peterson's wood carvings; Stuart Buehler's bone sculptures and driftwood pieces; Gregory Grenon's expressionist paintings of women; George Dureau's compelling photographs of nude black men; African-born Wagué's ceramics; French artist Fléchemuller's fish art; and Tom Cramer's carvings.

The eclectic mix has brought much richness to this city's cultural life and may, say some, be symbolic of Jamison's colorful personal history. (While the list of artists represented by the gallery is extensive, it will stop growing come the end of July; Jamison, who is living with AIDS, has chosen to close the gallery.)

Born and raised in the Midwest, the 49-year-old Jamison attended Ohio's Kent State University at the height of the Vietnam conflict.

"I think William was actually sitting in class when he heard the shots ring out," says Rogers, in describing the infamous killings of four Kent

State students by National Guardsmen in May 1970. As on campuses nationwide, many students were protesting U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

"Apparently there was a lot of confusion after the shootings and the guards set up barricades around the campus. A long-haired William and his wife [Jamison was married at the time] talked their way past the guards so they could get out of there."

After completing his education (and ending stints as a florist and a college arts instructor) in Ohio, Jamison moved to Portland, became a partner in Victoria's Nephew, opened his Folk Craft Gallery, and later, the Jamison/Thomas Gallery.

"William has always pulled a lot of wagons," says Rogers. "Back in the '70s it was illegal in Portland for a restaurant to have outdoor seating. William thought it would add something positive to this town to allow people to be able to enjoy outdoor dining. He fought the city council over this and won. He also successfully stopped a McDonald's from going up across from Couch Park."

Rogers adds: "He's contributed so much to

this community—not just the arts community. Preserving the past has always been important to William. Both here and in Ohio, William has rallied to save old homes. He has always felt it was important to preserve that which is beautiful and historic."

Jamison has also been influential in getting area gallery owners to back First Thursday, a collaborative effort to attract the public to galleries. He's served on the Metropolitan Arts Commission, the board of the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, and the Oregon Art Institute's Contemporary Arts Council. He is a founder of Art/AIDS, which mobilizes the arts community to raise funds and awareness around HIV/AIDS issues, and he is an active member of the Portland Center for the Visual Arts and the Oregon Art Institute.

"But it's William's ability to connect with people that is so very William," says Thomas. "While I tended to be good at the managerial aspects of the business, William had this great spiritual quality that attracted artists who, even though they had extraordinary bodies of work, had no intentions of publicly showing it. William had a way of winning over their trust, and in doing so the gallery gained respect from galleries and artists nationwide."

Jane Beebe, a longtime friend and co-worker of Jamison's (as well as an artist herself), adds: "William has always been willing to let artists do what they wanted. He's ambitious, but in the very best way. He knows if artists are not constrained, they can produce works of accomplishment."

According to his friends and co-workers, Jamison's connectedness with people and community is not the only quality that sets him apart from so many others—so, too, does his sense of humor: "I don't consider myself to be a gullible guy, but William always gets me. *Always*," says Pulliam.

"No doubt about it," says Rogers, "William's sense of humor is definitely warped—and I love it."

Says Thomas: "I remember one year when William was at the Boo Ball [an annual Halloween fund-raiser for community radio station KBOO]. William came dressed as a table, with a table cloth and some flowers on top. He would crouch down, and people would actually think he was a table. They'd put their drinks or food on him, at which point he would stand up and totally freak them out. He took such great glee in seeing their reaction.... There's nobody like William Jamison."

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