

## The Virtuous Circle Is My Special Sauce

My name is Larassa Kabel. I am a full time working artist, and three years ago I accidentally opened a gallery in a bathroom.

It started because I'd decided to fix up one of the grungy bathrooms at work—the one that bothered me the most. It had brown stains on the ceiling tiles, the walls were dingy and gross, and there was a large metal locker full of discarded and forgotten junk taking up a large amount of a small space. I suddenly looked at it with fresh eyes and decided I'd had enough. I realized I'd enjoy the space cleaned up far more than I'd miss the time, money, and effort it would take to fix it. A little paint, new ceiling tiles, and the eviction of the locker made a startling transformation, and I remember looking around and thinking, "This place is so nice it could be a gallery!" That thought was so fun and funny that I decided to do it. I loved the idea of a gallery that mostly catered to an audience of one and paired the elevation of contemporary art with base bodily functions. The Golden Hind Gallery's first show was an international exhibit of found art and poetry titled *Lost + Found*, and it was a complete and utter delight! I had zero ambitions or expectations. I created for the joy, play, and love of it, and all of these things were reflected back in ways beyond my initial plans.

I keep saying "it's not a *real* gallery," but I keep doing things like it is. I feel so grateful to the artists who agree to have their work shown here that I want to treat them and their art with sincere consideration. I put up wall labels, send out postcards, have a reception for the artists, document the shows, and make gallery guides. For the first show, I asked Jeff Fleming, the then-director of the Des Moines Art Center, and Laura Burkhalter, a curator at the Des Moines Art Center, if they would consider writing a short essay on found art for the gallery guide. They both said yes, and they didn't want to be paid because they loved the project. At the end of the exhibition, I got a request to have the show travel to a coffee shop bathroom in Cedar Falls, and then another to have it go to a bathroom in a business in Des Moines. Then it traveled to a bathroom in Philadelphia! I've since toyed with the idea of creating a downloadable PDF that would allow people to print the show and display it in bathrooms around the world. Another nice sidebar is that one of the artists in the show ended up having that work shown at the Des Moines Art Center the next year.

The next show was a national one titled *Cowboys + Horse Girls*. I paired two artists I'd been following on Instagram, Carolyn Hopkins, a Washington State artist who creates large scale photo documents of performances she does with her horse, and Sante Fe artist Clayton Porter, who draws 2" tall photorealistic bronc riders on large blank white panels. I liked the idea of having a monumentally scaled photo in dialog with one tiny rider directly on a wall, and I thought Clayton might let me print one of his drawings on vinyl so I could carefully trim it out and stick it up. Carolyn was happy to send me a file to print, but Clayton didn't like the idea of the vinyl. "I don't like the way my drawings look printed," he wrote. "But I'd be willing to come install a drawing directly on the wall." This was... unexpected. I decided I needed to clarify that this was not a *real* gallery, just a bathroom in Des Moines, IA. He was ok with that. Then I asked him what kind of compensation he'd like for installing his work, because it's just me doing all this,

and he countered with “gas money.” I could totally do that! He said it would take him a week to do the drawing, so I offered him our guest bedroom to stay in while he was here. I think he and I both were wondering if this was a good idea, because it does NOT look good on paper. But my intuition told me it was going to be fine, and it was. Actually, it was more than fine. Clayton stayed with my husband and I for a week and became part of the family. He came back twice the next year because he loved Des Moines so much, and he’s coming back again this year. On top of that, Carolyn Hopkins thought all three of us should try to get a show together, sent out proposals to several museums, and landed one for 2026 in a museum in Montana, while I pitched a show of our work to my gallery in Des Moines and got accepted.

The next show paired Jenn Dierdorf of Brooklyn, NY with Des Moines photographer Brittany Brooke Crow to talk about the female body and autonomy. Titled *Pussy*, this show garnered our first sale (no efforts have ever been made to actually sell work, so this came as a nice surprise). Then I had guest curator Noah Doely put together a show about how we now have thousands of photos on our smartphones that are never printed or really even viewed. The gallery received hundreds of entries from around the world. After that, I was approached by Stephanie Brunia, a photographer I’ve admired for years. She was in the process of developing a new body of work and wondered if she could have a show. The gallery was the perfect balance of professional-but-low-stakes that she needed to see how the prints looked hung together.

It is only in hindsight that I can see that The Golden Hind Gallery is a sterling example of the virtuous circle. I never intended to get anything out of it. At each point in this journey, I’ve followed my impulse towards inclusion, connection, community, playfulness, and generosity, and that has encouraged other people to do the same. Like engenders like. People match the energy you project. All too often, the art world feels competitive and self-serving, but I know that I am where I am because other people have been generous with their time, knowledge, attention, and opportunities. This “gallery” was never intended to be anything more than a playful experiment, and yet it has been a source of genuine joy and unexpected opportunities.