

## Biography

### R. L. Croft

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**April 29, 1958-59:** Robert L. Croft, Jr., nicknamed Robin, is born in Fayetteville, NC shortly before his father completes duty in the U. S. Army dental corps. The family subsequently moves to South Hill, a small tobacco market town in southern Virginia, where Dr. Croft establishes a dental practice. Early memories of primary colors include his red metal toy truck, a yellow wood canoe, and his father's blue Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. A black woman, Lena Wright, is employed part-time for cleaning and childcare. She quietly impacts all four Croft children for three decades.

**1960:** Robin's sister, Susan Elizabeth, is born.

**1962-63:** Robin's mother commits suicide. He retains few memories of her, and both children are unaware of the cause of death until their late teens. The children's paternal grandparents move in to help with their upbringing, but when Mr. Croft develops health problems, both grandparents return to their home in Florida. Robin is discovered to be highly allergic to tobacco, pollen and other allergens. The Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement rage in the background from childhood through adolescence.

**1964-69:** Robin enters first grade. Dr. Croft remarries the following year. During grade school, Robin sees art for the first time when the Virginia Museum's Artmobile visits town. The Artmobile vehicle interests him as much as its exhibits. America is riddled with assassinations. Men land on the moon.

**1970-73:** Integration in southern Virginia finally impacts Robin upon entering the sixth grade class of Mrs. Hendrick, a black teacher whom he admires. Religion is a strong influence throughout childhood, though its strictures grow suffocating and hypocritical. He subscribes to *Mad Magazine* and becomes enamored of cartooning. Though interest in drawing intensifies, its results are undisciplined and adolescent in nature. Robin enters junior high in what was formerly the black high school. Exposure to African American teachers and classmates increases his awareness of racial issues. His first art teacher, Mrs. Vivian Ross, is a black woman of dry wit and great enthusiasm who excites his interest in art. A half brother and a half sister are born.

**1974-76:** The Vietnam War officially ends. Panicking Vietnamese cling to overloaded helicopters leaving the U.S. embassy roof on the day he turns seventeen. Though certain he wants to study art in college, Robin's white high school art teacher proves to be uninspiring and allows her fundamentalist religious beliefs to intrude on class assignments. His understanding of art and art history languishes until college. Afternoons, weekends and summers are spent working as a grocery stock clerk, janitor, carpenter's helper and dishwasher. He also works in a clothing factory driving a truck and moving large bolts of cloth on dollies.

**1976-79:** Robin majors in painting and printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. His sister Susan shares with him that she's learned of their mother's suicide. A slow process of reevaluating his childhood begins with this new knowledge. He is interested in late Philip Guston, New Imagists, Hairy Who, H. C. Westermann, Mondrian, de Chirico and many others. Summer jobs find him working at a prefabricated housing factory and as a carpenter's helper. He meets and begins dating Catherine (Cathy) Ellen Senkow.

**1980-92:** After graduation, they move to Northern Virginia. Robin's last summer job is spent working from carpentry on the Route 66 and Orange Line construction project in Arlington. The couple marries, and he begins the first of many technical illustration and graphic design jobs. In the studio, this 12-year period begins with a frustrating string of false starts and discarded canvases. In the mid-80s, a transformation begins as wall-hung panels with sculptural elements replace oil-on-canvas. By the early 1990s, only sculpture is being produced. After the couple moves to Manassas, their first daughter, Carly, is born.

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**1992-present:** Sculptures become more ambitious in size, yet dedicated to personal scale. A growing sense of confidence ends a self-imposed abstention from self-promotion. For the first time since college, Robin enters exhibitions. A second daughter, Maggie, is born. Treatment of sculpture as drawing helps bring about a return to sketchbooks and drawings on paper, activities dormant since college, yet now considered parallel, independent pursuits.