

Stephen Friedman Gallery

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And just like that, Austin-based artist Deborah Roberts featured in 'Sex and the City' sequel

Kelsey Bradshaw

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In the fourth episode of the "Sex and the City" reboot — latest instalment, sequel, whatever you want to call it — Charlotte namedrops Austin's Deborah Roberts.

And we couldn't help but wonder ... how did the local artist end up in the HBO Max show?

Roberts, whose art you'll recognise if you've visited the Contemporary Austin or the Blanton Museum of Art recently, works with mixed media and collage. Her pieces often focus on what it's like to grow up as a Black girl in America.

In "And Just Like That," the "Sex and the City" characters' latest story, Roberts' piece titled "The Unseen" can be briefly seen hanging in a new character's luxury apartment. The piece features two Black girls and provokes conversation about the meaning of innocence — why Black bodies and Black girls are not considered innocent by society, Roberts told the American-Statesman on Jan. 6.



Image: Nicole Ari Parker plays Lisa Todd Wexley in "And Just Like That." Deborah Roberts' "Political Lambs in a Wolf's World" is seen in episode four of the show. Contributed By: Craig Blankenhorn

A second piece, "Political Lambs in a Wolf's World," can also be seen when the character Charlotte (played by Kristin Davis) and her husband, Harry (Evan Handler), enter the apartment. The apartment belongs to new characters Lisa Todd Wexley and Herbert Wexley (Nicole Ari Parker and Chris Jackson, respectively).

An art consultant reached out to Roberts in the fall and asked her to send some work over. Roberts had to sign a nondisclosure agreement after the show chose which pieces they wanted to use, but she didn't know which episode would feature the artwork or how it would appear.



Image: "The Unseen" by Deborah Roberts is briefly featured in episode four of "And Just Like That." Contributed By Deborah Roberts

"I did not know that they were going to mention my name. That was a surprise to me," Roberts said. "I was shocked. It was a really full-circle moment for me because I did watch 'Sex and the City.' I used to tape it for my friend because she didn't have HBO. ... It was like a coming of age series for us, even though there (weren't) any Black characters, like they're doing today. It was just young women making it in New York City, with all the trappings of success and failure."

The showrunners have added several characters of colour to "And Just Like That," played by performers including Sara Ramirez, Sarita Choudhury and Karen Pittman, as well as Parker and Jackson.

"They've gotten to be more inclusive," Roberts said. "I think it's a perfect thing. You can't do a whole show in New York City and have no Black people or no brown people. That just doesn't exist. I applaud them for their efforts to make it more realistic and to give the characters both heroic features and flaws and the same struggles that everybody goes through."

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As a fan of the original show, Roberts said she knew she wanted to be part of "And Just Like That" right away. Her work is also featured in Ava DuVernay's "Colin in Black and White," a Netflix docuseries that chronicles the life of activist and football player Colin Kaepernick.

Other shows have approached Roberts, she said, but she doesn't always go for it. It depends on what the project is.

"My focus is mainly getting my work into the hands of museums and doing shows internationally," Roberts said.



Image: Long-time Austin artist Deborah Roberts has broken out on the international scene after decades as one of the city's favourite makers of art. Contributed By Mark Poucher/The Contemporary Austin

Some of Roberts' work will be featured in a national magazine next month (she can't tell us which one), and she's getting ready for a solo show at Stephen Friedman Gallery in London for this summer. In October, she'll have a two-person show at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio with artist Benny Andrews.

Roberts currently has a couple of pieces on display at the Blanton Museum of Art's "Assembly" exhibit. A solo show at the Contemporary Austin's Jones Centre, "Deborah Roberts: I'm," ran for most of 2021.

We couldn't end our chat with Roberts without asking a very important question: Is she a Miranda, Charlotte, Samantha or Carrie?

"When I watched the show, I guess in my 30s, I was more Miranda. She was out fighting for justice, and I was doing a lot of community activism work in Austin. I think if I look at my 50s, and they're in their 50s now, I'm more Carrie. I feel like my success has now come full circle, and I have a nice beautiful home. I want lovely things. I want a life where I can travel and do different things," Roberts said.

She knows she definitely was not a Carrie in her 20s: "I was broke as (expletive), and I don't know how she afforded those Manolo Blahniks."