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# Compelling Video Captures an Emotional Landscape

Featuring **NIKON AMBASSADOR ROBIN LAYTON**

**R**obin Layton had a plan. She always does.

Called on to make a video for the painter Neltje Doubleday, Robin realized early on that location was going to be a key element.

The video she created is a 12-1/2-minute portrait of the artist living and working in the solitude of northern Wyoming amid a landscape that nurtures and energizes her spirit and offers solace from memories of a troubled past. It was commissioned as a companion piece to Neltje's memoir, *North of Crazy*, which paints a deeper, detailed picture of her life and times.

Robin's plan was to make several visits during different seasons to capture Neltje's relationship to the land. Neltje, who for many years has been known only by her first name, says she felt a "a sense of belonging" to the land the first moment she set foot on it, almost as if she were destined to be there and draw inspiration from "the small gestures of nature" she observed around her.

It was up to Robin to visualize these gestures and to depict Neltje's appreciation of the place in which she found the freedom to become the person she wanted to be.

At the same time, there was the need to depict Neltje's nature: she is an abstract expressionist painter who creates in bold, colorful, sometimes seemingly spontaneous strokes. The video was not to be a life story; that was the memoir's function. Robin was to create a life-at-these-moments story in which Neltje's narration would reveal her connection to the moments.

In the pairing of artists, Robin would show, Neltje would tell.

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Abstract expressionist painter Neltje. "I do not know what my paintings are about until I'm finished. They seem to be about nature and womanhood."

## Single Handed

Photojournalist Robin Layton made her first video in 2011. It was about her dog. It was irresistible. Networking and social media ensured viral status.

"The experience of making it was pretty much learning as I went along," she says. "I'd heard during my whole career as a photojournalist—you should be a

director...you should be a cinematographer...you see differently, and the way you tell stories, you'd be good at it."

Robin understood immediately that video was a powerful way to not only tell stories, but to create and evoke moods. The videos she made over the years brought her to Neltje's attention and then to northern Wyoming.

Robin worked alone for most of the project—she was videographer, producer, director, editor, interviewer and taker of notes for Neltje's narration. She shot with three Nikon cameras—D500, D5, D850—for quick-switch access to her NIKKOR lenses, which included an AF Micro-Nikkor 105mm f/2.8D, an AF-S NIKKOR 14-24mm f/2.8G ED (for inside-the-car shots), an AF-S NIKKOR 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6G ED VR, an AF-S NIKKOR 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6G ED VR and an AF-S NIKKOR 200-500mm f/5.6E ED VR.

"I went out there for three to five days on three separate trips," Robin says, "and the thing I'm most proud of is that it was just me and my tripod. Sometimes I'd hire a drone photographer to go with me to get some of the aerial shots, but otherwise it was me. I shot the piece, picked the music for it and edited it. I was a woman with many hats."

When Robin interviewed Neltje for narration notes, she already had the footage, and she would guide Neltje to shots and sequences. "I'd say, 'waterfall,' and then write down what she had to say. Neltje did a re-write from my notes and that became the narration. She's a writer, she knew what to say for the visuals—it's her story, and I really didn't have to give her much direction. But I kind of put the notes into sections: 'Side of your house...walking...painting...what does it feel like?' She knew what we'd shot of course, but the sections made it easy for her to narrate it." So add another hat: organizer-in-chief.

Robin's goal was clear from the start, and that aspect cannot be underestimated. Neltje wanted a film that worked with a very personal book. She wanted to express how much she appreciates being the person she is in the place she lives and the sense of freedom that comes with that awareness.

Trust was vital, but Neltje had seen Robin's videos and could sense a kindred spirit. "She wanted me to be a fly on the wall," Robin says, but as they worked together and Neltje saw some of the footage, she came to appreciate Robin's observant eye. "She said things like, 'You see things I miss, and I live here,' and 'You capture the energy of things.' I didn't show her a ton, but she saw enough to see my vision of the story."

In fact, close study of the video reveals just that: a portrait of two artists.

Visit Nikon Ambassador Robin Layton's website, [www.robinlayton.com](http://www.robinlayton.com), to view Something Good, her first video production (click on Films, then scroll down), as well as still photos in her fine art and commercial portfolios.



*Featuring*

**ROBIN LAYTON**



**NIKON AMBASSADOR**  
UNITED STATES

During her 25 years as a photojournalist, Robin Layton, has produced countless notable photographs and earned a place among the world's top photographers. She has also expanded the boundaries of traditional photography, combining her images with vintage found objects to create critically-acclaimed and highly sought art pieces. Visit her website at [www.robinlayton.com](http://www.robinlayton.com) and check out her [ambassador page](#).

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