

FEATURE



A place for all artists

Kitchener-Waterloo Society of Artists provides community for those who often work alone

BY JULIE-MARIE INNES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREJ IVANOV

A place to connect, reflect and share opportunities for personal and professional growth can be an invaluable resource for artists who often work in isolation.

"Making art can be a very insular and lonely occupation," Kitchener artist Arlene McCarthy says. "After a while you don't

inspire yourself, and you have to see other art and talk about your art in order to be inspired to create – at least I do."

Luckily for McCarthy and others like her, there is the Kitchener-Waterloo Society of Artists, of which she is the vice-president.

The KWSA was formed in 1931 when Ralph Connor, the society's first president, placed an ad in what was then the Kitchener Daily Record newspaper, inviting

local artists to meet in the Oak Room at Schreiter's Furniture to talk about their mutual interest and begin critiquing sessions, sketching trips and exhibitions at local venues. A variety of locations, including the Kitchener Public Library, Doon School of Fine Arts and even a bicycle shed next to Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate, served as their meeting places.

Today the organization boasts a membership of more than 130 artists working in a variety of mediums from watercolour and acrylics to mixed media and photography. They gather the first Tuesday evening of every month from September to June at the Button Factory Arts in Waterloo. While the majority of its members are 65 and older, it is actively encouraging younger members to join and has several students on its roster.

"It's a very nurturing, open, encouraging group," says artist Anne Williamson, the group's president. "I think there's a wealth of talent in our region and, if you're an artist, there's no prerequisite for joining."

As well as networking, monthly meetings include a speaker's spotlight in which acclaimed artists share tips and stories. Members' work is showcased at an annual juried show, which will be held in March at Homer Watson House and Gallery. Other locales providing a space to view their talents include The Link, Frames by Verne, Minto Arts Council, Button Factory Arts and the Kitchener Public Library.

"We promote artists, encourage them and provide opportunities for them to show and sell their work," says Williamson, who is always looking for more places to exhibit, but also wants to ensure artists receive fair pay for their talent and efforts.

"I'd like to see our presence grow and become a little more prominent in K-W," Williamson says. "I think it will over time."

Anne Williamson, left, president of the Kitchener-Waterloo Society of Artists, and Arlene McCarthy, vice-president, pose in front of various artworks by society members at Frames by Verne in Kitchener.



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TIINA PRICE

Tiina Price's exuberant personality is infectious, and it spills over into her artwork. That enthusiasm fuels her creativity and has helped her develop a loyal following, not only in her hometown of Cambridge, but also nationally and internationally where her watercolours have garnered recognition and awards.

She credits her husband for gently nudging her into painting when he gave her a watercolour set for Christmas after she retired as an English and art teacher in 2001.

"He wanted to know my plan for my free time, so I blurted out, 'I think I'll watercolour paint!' " she recalls.

Her first painting lesson was in 2002 at Kitchener's Homer Watson House & Gallery, with instructor Marion Anderson. In March, Price will be back at Homer Watson Gallery, this time showcasing her work in a room all of her own. She earned this honour by receiving the Curator's Choice Award during the society of artists' 2018 juried show.

"Everybody has a creative side to them," Price says. "I'm so lucky and to think I've actually been able to become a painter, it just astounds me."

A member of KWSA since 2004, Price has soaked in every opportunity to grow and improve her skills, along with forging friendships with like-minded souls.

"There's that whole collegial spirit at KWSA," she explains. "It's got a really good atmosphere. Everybody is supportive. If you're a photographer, a watercolourist or paint in oils, whatever your thing can be. We all recognize the struggles that other people have and the need for some validation. It's good; you spur each other on."

Price paints mainly in watercolour, with subject matter varying from landscapes and still lifes to portraits and animal life. Inspiration comes from her travels, her gardens, and even walking her two dogs,



ABOVE: Tiina Price poses for a portrait in the kitchen of her Cambridge home. Price says she likes to work in her solarium or in the kitchen, where she can paint while standing at the island.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Roger Young poses with one of his canvas prints in his workshop at his home in Cambridge. Young, who used to teach photography at Conestoga College, is also working on a series of prints, making alphabet lettering out of his images of reeds.



ROGER YOUNG

Roger Young refers to his fine-art photographs as stories, and he uses light to tell those stories, whether it's still-life florals, landscapes or studies in composition. It's something he's been perfecting and experimenting with for more than 40 years, and it's brought him not only acclaim, but also great satisfaction.

"A friend says I go into a Zen state when I pick up my camera," Young says. "I just close the world off and then I'm open to things. I'll be walking around over by Puslinch or in Wellington County, and I'll see the darndest things growing in the spring. You're looking down and go, 'Wait a minute,' and I get down on my hands and knees and take a picture."

Young has made his living doing photography, starting as a painter studying with John Rennie in Port Carling, then turning to photography during university days at McMaster.

Buying his first 35-millimetre camera was pivotal. "Photography always fascinated me. I knew where I was going. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I knew that was it."

A night course in photography at Sheridan College guided him in his early stages and then he moved on to work in

medical, media and freelance photography. Cambridge has served as home base for more than 30 years where he has honed his skills. He also taught photography at Conestoga College for 15 years.

Working with film in those early days and developing his black-and-white work in the dark room was challenging and limiting. Now digital has opened a world of opportunities.

"For colour, digital is spectacular," he raves. "The range is just incredible."

Sharing and connecting on the intricacies and innovations in his craft is just one of the benefits he has enjoyed during his eight-year membership in the Kitchener-Waterloo Society of Artists.

"We talk composition and colour; it's just a language we all use," he explains. KWSA has revived his interest in his art and given it a broader audience during its many shows. His work is also displayed at The People's Gallery in Waterloo and Frames by Verne in Kitchener.

"I get ideas at KWSA," he says. "Someone gave a talk there on the use of pastels and now I'm trying to combine my photography with pastels. The biggest problem is trying to find the right paper that can handle both. I'm pushing and pushing and hope to get up enough nerve to exhibit in that format in the future."

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JOSEPHINE CZECH

With three boys under the age of seven, Josephine Czech says being a member of the society of artists "is like being on a mini-vacation."

Czech takes full advantage of the opportunity to attend KWSA's monthly meetings and mix with fellow artists who offer not only fellowship, but also advice for her burgeoning art career.

"It's isolating to be a stay-at-home mom," she says. "KWSA is time for me. I needed to talk to people who do art. It's just great. Everyone is so friendly, and the organization keeps you posted on where you can do shows and how to apply."

Czech paints in oils and is captivated by her surroundings, especially near her home in rural New Hamburg. Capturing the essence of the rolling pastures and landscapes, she unearths the beauty of simple scenery with a keen eye for colour

and texture.

She comes from a family of artists that includes potters and sculptors. Her father's craftsmanship building wooden boats also plays a role in her subject matter. Scenes from Nipissing and Georgian Bay's shorelines, where he keeps his boats, feature prominently in her work.

Armed with a bachelor of fine art from the University of Waterloo, she says her realistic painting has been primarily self-taught and is fuelled by books, YouTube videos and other artists during instructional time at KWSA meetings.

Oil is her preferred medium and she likens it to "colourful butter that's fun to work with."

A camera is always with her and so are her inspirations, which are often found during walks or drives on the country roads. "My kids at this point know mom is going to pull over all the time to take pictures. I have to. The landscapes around here – I

Josephine Czech poses for a portrait with one of her paintings in her home studio in New Hamburg.

just have to do something with them." Her boys, Sully, Frankie and Leo, have also recently been featured in her work and may form the basis for an upcoming series.

While always looking for places to show and sell her work, including at the New Hamburg Studio Tour, she regularly enters juried shows like Paint Ontario in Grand Bend and at KWSA's juried show where she's previously been awarded the Curator's Choice Award and a Juror's Choice Award.

As one of the younger members in the KWSA group, learning from the longtime professionals and hobbyists helps her. The sharing goes both ways. "They have great advice. I also help many of them with Instagram, telling them 'You've got to hashtag!'"



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