



Annie Bergen – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #93

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Bill C

January 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council revisits previously featured visual artist Annie Bergen, who lives a few kilometers east of Whitemouth. She has been located there for around seven years but, prior to that, she lived in Winnipeg. Bergen is a painter, primarily focusing on large scale interior and exterior murals. She also likes opportunities to experiment with her murals, adding cut-outs or mosaic elements to enhance the pieces.

Two of her Winnipeg projects received Mural of the Year award – an MTS mural on Salter Avenue, and “Restoration” – which is a mixed media, community made mosaic/mural located at the Red Road Lodge. She said, “I love driving around Winnipeg, where I have several exterior murals, seeing my artwork in public spaces for everyone to enjoy.”

Bergen also enjoys making art that inspires and engages the public, and that visually enhances public spaces. In partnership with Whitemouth River Recreation Commission, she directed a project in Whitemouth called “Co-op Community Trail.” It features community-made paintings and mosaics, created with input from the locals, placed along a 1500 foot path. Funded by Community Spaces, Sunova and Manitoba Arts Council, the trail weaves throughout the grounds of the



Annie Bergen



Whitemouth Community Centre. Bergen feels particularly proud of these eye-catching installations.

Annie Bergen

In her career with the Artists in Schools program, she has worked with about 10,000 students, creating more than 60 murals in schools throughout Manitoba. Recently, she visited Lac du Bonnet Senior School to create murals. She said, “I find the act of teaching and sharing my skills with others very satisfying. I love engaging students and the community to help with these massive school murals and public mosaics.”

When asked about her influences, Bergen cites the late Marcel Dubriel, a Winkler high school art teacher who lived in the Pembina Valley, as her greatest mentor. Also, a local artist named Neil Fehr provided inspiration and guidance. Not only that, he hired her to help in his art gallery-studio in Winkler. This gave Bergen opportunities to access studio space, spending time experimenting with media and developing her skills and interests.

She said, “Aside from those two mentors, I am a self-taught artist and have basically just persisted with my own art practice over the years – carving out a niche for myself as a mural painter and blending that with my interest in working with students.”



Annie Bergen



Annie Bergen



Annie Bergen



Annie Bergen



Joye Platford – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #94

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Bill C

February 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council features visual artist Joye Platford. A few years ago, she returned to her hometown of Pinawa after living in Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Since her return, she has become involved in the local arts community, as a member of the Pinawa Art Gallery (Art 211) and Winnipeg River Arts Council.

In 2009, she lived through serious cancer challenges and making art was part of her healing. After her treatments, she decided she was going to look into art therapy, but it was only offered in Winnipeg and there was a two year wait list. With her degrees in education and theology, she found employment in the Eastman area doing church work, teaching, and offering recreational art classes for children, adults and seniors.



Joye Platford

Despite the distance and wait list obstacles, Platford managed to pursue her dream, and, in November, 2018, she graduated as an art therapist, which is a mental health professional who uses counselling and art to help people deal with emotional and psychological challenges. Platford said, "All my life, I used art-making to sort out my thoughts. And now I have completed a dream that I had for over 15 years."

Platford took her training through Winnipeg Holistic Expressive Art Therapy (WHEAT) Institute at St. Norbert Center for the Arts. Art therapy works because people often experience difficulties in life but they might not be able to express their feelings about these

difficulties in words. Instead, they can express them through art making. She said, “Art therapy brings together all aspects of my life, art, healing, spirituality, counselling, and personal growth.”

Platford offers art therapy in Pinawa and Beausejour. In Pinawa, she works through the art gallery. In Beausejour, she works at 708 Park Avenue. She said, “I wanted to stay in the rural area to provide the needed services.

Platford explains that a person does not have to be artistic to do art therapy. It is about relaxation, release, symbolism, expression of emotions, trauma resolution, and restoration of hope. She said, “I’ve seen amazing results with children-in-care, seniors with dementia, and people working on mental health challenges, self-care, addictions, and family issues.

In Beausejour, she offers classes for children and youth on Thursdays and a women’s group on Wednesday nights, and plans to start a Wednesday morning group. Also, she does individual sessions with all ages, in Pinawa or Beausejour. On March 13-15, she will be offering a women’s retreat at Moon Gate Guest House near Elma. She can be contacted through her website, www.joyezart.com or call/ text (204) 459-0355.



Joye Platford



Joye Platford



Joye Platford



Brenda McKenzie – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #95

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Bill C

March 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council revisits previously featured visual artist and author Brenda McKenzie. Since 1971, she has lived in Pinawa. She said, “But, before that, as an ‘army brat,’ I lived in various places.”

Her favourite medium includes acrylics, water colour, and occasionally, pen and ink. When asked about what inspires her art work, she said, “Colour is my first inspiration, and then how light defines an object or creates a mood.”

In the 1960’s, she took lessons at Winnipeg Art Gallery, and, in junior high, she participated in an art club with her teacher John Esler. At the University of Manitoba, she studied in the Faculty of Interior Design, learning from H. Adaskin and other staff. She said, “It was an intensive education in design of images, display, and colour.”



Brenda McKenzie

In Pinawa, she worked for five decades with well-known artist and high school art teacher, Vivian Thomson. When Thomson retired, McKenzie took over her classes. Prior to being hired for this fulltime art specialist position, she worked, for more than thirty years, as a substitute teacher in Pinawa schools. She also taught private art lessons for both adults and children. During the quarantine, she’s doing Skype art classes with two girls in England.

McKenzie’s work been exhibited at Crea8ery Gallery in Winnipeg’s Exchange District, Selkirk’s Fox Gallery, Pinawa’s Art 211 Gallery, and numerous Juried Art Exhibitions in the Winnipeg River district, and has been shown and sold at markets in Beausejour and Lac du

Bonnet. Her photography, oil painting, and acrylic painting have won awards at Juried Art Exhibitions in Pinawa, Lac du Bonnet, and Beausejour. Last summer, WRAC included her “Aurora Path” paddle painting in their popular art auction.

Given all her years of teaching and creating, it’s no surprise McKenzie has become involved in local arts projects, including ART 211 Gallery, Juried (and Judged) Art Exhibitions, and Winnipeg River Arts Council. After years as a board member, she now serves as WRAC president and contributes countless volunteer hours to the council’s stated mission of “connecting people through art.”

Like many local artists, her work reflects the natural surroundings of Eastman, in all four seasons. But she prefers the winter light to harsher summer sun and shadows.

She said, “My ultimate work is portraiture – both animals and humans.” In 2017, McKenzie’s portrait of her mother-in-law won a prize at Lac du Bonnet Juried Art Exhibition. This picture portrays the older woman gazing into a past that has been clouded by Alzheimer’s.

Related to this topic, McKenzie’s first book, *Loving You*, was a memoir about finding help for her mother-in-law’s dementia. It sold independently across Canada and throughout Manitoba. She has just finished her second book, over 350 pages long, and she awaits reviews from her critics/readers.

McKenzie’s favourite art quote comes from Pablo Picasso: “Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.”



Ray St. Hilaire – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #96

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Bill C

April 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council updates the profile of local musician, Ray St. Hilaire. Born and raised in Winnipeg, he retired to live full time near the town of Lac du Bonnet, on the shores of the Winnipeg River. Before he moved to the country, he worked as an industrial mechanic in the city. But he never abandoned his love of music.

His musical journey began with learning how to play the accordion. When he was twelve, he took accordion lessons for six months. He said, "It's a wonderful instrument that seems to have fallen by the wayside over the years."

But his accordion sessions soon ended after he saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show and experienced a musical epiphany. Somehow, he knew the electric guitar would provide "the ticket to my five minutes of fame."



Ray St. Hilaire

He immediately switched to guitar. Since then, he has played rhythm guitar and bass guitar, and has sung in my many bands. A couple of years ago, he had the good fortune to be gifted an upright bass, also called a double bass. He uses it in his musical ensemble called "Rice and Beans, the Band." He said, "The upright bass is more fun than a barrel of monkeys. "

To keep his fingers nimble and his voice strong, he welcomes all opportunities to entertain folks who love good music and loves to get hired by local venues. When asked what motivates him to keep practicing and performing, he said, "Music is so invigorating and at the same time relaxing."

For over forty years, St. Hilaire was involved in the Winnipeg music scene. He has performed all over Manitoba, as far south as Emerson and as far north as The Pas. Although he travels far and wide to numerous gigs, and even performs during vacations in Mexico, he happily makes time to instruct young musicians.

He said, “A musician loves to play for him or herself, but the greatest joy comes from sharing and showing his art with others. I have taught guitar for years and am so proud of my students who have surpassed my expectations.”

His band has played at Festival du Voyageur, 4P Festival, and the anniversary gathering for Harley-Davidson Owners of Canada. He also loves appearing at the Lac du Bonnet Personal Care Home with his group and loves seeing how the residents respond to his songs.

According to St. Hilaire, the most worthwhile achievement has been performing every year for the Children’s Wish Foundation at their charity fundraiser. In addition, he has volunteered for several years as a board member for the Winnipeg River Arts Council and even stepped up to serve as its president.

His favourite quote: “When the music is over – turn out the lights” Jim Morrison, The Doors.



Ray St. Hilaire with Rice and Beans



Ray St. Hilaire with Rice and Beans



Anita Schewe Drabyk – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #97

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Bill C

May 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council updates the profile of photographer, visual artist, editor and writer Anita Schewe Drabyk. After growing up on a farm near Beausejour, she studied biology and ecology at both Winnipeg universities, resided in Saskatoon, and moved to Pinawa in 1985. While her husband worked in China, she lived near Shanghai for two years.

Drabyk's photography, visual art and writing combine all of her interests, including biology studies, life experiences and love of nature. For her, close-ups of flowers and objects showcase the beauty and colour hidden in otherwise softer scenes. She also enjoys working with the subtleties of the light and colour of the prairies. Places she has visited and people she has met influence all of her work.



Anita Drabyk

She creates her art and photography by experimenting with different media and incorporating the advice and expertise of various painters, photographers and writers from across Canada. She said, "In my nonfiction writing, I draw on personal experiences growing up and working."

Drabyk learned her art forms by self-study but also with the help of many teachers. She has taken courses at Emily Carr School of Art and with Courtney Milne, a Saskatchewan photographer, and participated in a Saskatoon photography group.

Over the years, she joined several Pinawa art and photography groups, and various local writing groups. Vivian Thomson, a well-known Pinawa artist, Nancy-Lou Ateah, an experienced artist in Victoria Beach, and many other instructors have helped her refine her

techniques and expand her knowledge. She has also taken writing classes with Donna Besel, an award-winning writer. She said, “Our own local artists have provided great inspiration, knowledge, and practice.”

Recently, Boreal Shores Tour featured Drabyk’s work, at one of the tour’s stops in Pinawa. She has also taught introductory photography classes and art classes including two years as an aide in the Canadian school in China. She said, “Having a daughter in Girl Guides, hockey and sports has expanded my subject areas for all of my artistic pursuits.”

Her favourite art quote: “Nature is so powerful, so strong. Capturing its essence is not easy – your work becomes a dance with light and the weather. It takes you to a place within yourself.” – Annie Leibovitz



by Anita Drabyk



by Anita Drabyk



by Anita Drabyk



by Anita Drabek



Jim Niedermayer – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #98

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Bill C

June 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council updates the profile of chainsaw carver, Jim Niedermayer. Born and raised in Powerview-Pine Falls, he's spent plenty of time in the boreal forest, especially when he's harvesting wild rice on his assigned lakes. From a young age, Nature intrigued him and he learned early to have the utmost respect for all living things.



Jim Niedermayer

When he's creating his art, his main goal is to repurpose dead trees. He often goes to people's yards and carves the stumps left behind after their beloved mature spruce, pine or oak is removed. He said, "I enjoy putting life back into them, carving animals and birds that had once depended on the trees."

Niedermayer's skills with a chain saw are self-taught. In 2009, when the paper mill in Pine Falls shut down, he decided to start carving. People responded positively to his first efforts and their reactions made him determined to improve. His persistence paid off.

He began to take part in competitions, where he met lots of amazing carvers, in places ranging from Peterborough to Moosejaw to Winnipeg, and many other communities. He said, "They push me to do my best and exceed expectations. It's challenging and gratifying getting together and competing with so many talented artists."

Niedermayer enjoys competitions because the participants give each other a helping hand when needed. He said, "It's a small world. We've become a carver family." He also values the support and work of his wife, Joanne. "She serves as my assistant at most events and is a big part of my carving career."

Niedermayer notes that chainsaw carving is a fast-growing pastime, combining sport, entertainment, and art. It involves great physical effort, such as moving logs and equipment, controlling the various saws, and standing for as long as it takes to complete a carving. The act of carving also offers unlimited opportunities to explore creative concepts and keeps crowds enthralled for hours.

As a carver, Niedermayer has won many awards and met many interesting people. He notes two of the most memorable. When Sean Penn visited Manitoba to film the movie, "Flag Day," he purchased a carving and took it back to the United States.

Another time, Niedermayer was working on a spruce tree at a city golf course. The course was closed to the public and the Winnipeg Jets were participating in a fundraising event. The players became so fascinated by his project that Niedermayer ended up hanging out with them. He said, "Mark Scheifele signed my saw. We joked how it was the first time for him, signing a chainsaw. I think he'll remember me."

As will many other people who have seen Niedermayer doing what he loves, making beautiful art out of a log or a stump.



Jim Niedermayer



Jim Niedermayer



Jim Niedermayer



Jim Niedermayer



Walter Keller – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #99

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Bill C

July 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council updates the profile of chainsaw carver Walter Keller. Born in Switzerland, he came to Canada in 1967 and now lives in Elma. After years of forestry work and log building, he discovered chainsaw carving. And, since 2009, he has been teaching others how to carve with a chainsaw.

Totally self-taught, Keller has become well-known as an accomplished artist. But he admits his intention to stick to strictly freelance pieces has failed. Among recent commissions, two stand out: a corporate client asked him to carve a giant Western Red cedar log into a totem (the largest work he had ever done), and the Winnipeg Art Gallery's board chairman asked him to create a group of six bear sculptures for his office. Keller said, "Over the last decade, I've worked for an ever-widening circle of clients. And challenging commissions came my way and I could not refuse."



Walter Keller

It is the special interactions with his clients that fuel his dedication. Clients have handed him cash through the half-opened window of a vehicle at a highway rest stop, but he has also been invited to unveiling parties with a lot of pomp and honor.



Recently, Keller has focused on refining his carving techniques, by reducing power tool use in favor of hand tool application, to highlight growth forms provided by Mother Nature. Largely due to his clients' wishes, he also overcame his dislike of applying colours.

He still does large pieces, but climbing scaffolds, working from ladders or crawling on hands and knees often cause pain and fatigue. Also, his long-standing annual three day carving courses ended when his co-host could no longer help. However, he still attends about three regional shows every year and takes pleasure in displaying his art with the close-knit group formerly known as Agassiz Chainsaw Sculptors. In more predictable times, the members have exhibited at Fire 'n Water Festival, Beausejour Rodeo, Festival du Voyageur, and 4P event in Powerview.

He said, "This year, I plan to do some charitable work in the public domain; where this will take me remains to be seen."

Given his reluctance to compete against friends and his belief that performing for crowds downgrades the actual art making, regular carving competitions do not work for him. He especially detests the speed carve, limited by the clock and blaring horns.

Keller feels thankful for the opportunities to learn and grow. But he believes all is not well in this world and he hopes that his pieces of art will raise awareness of the real value of wood and trees. He said, "Mankind reduces forest environments through clearing and converting land. In our own back yards, trees get discarded without even an attempt for any kind of utilization."

In response, he has proclaimed himself as "Patrona Sylvatica," the patron saint of the boreal forest. In the accompanying photo, he poses with a sculpture which represents the nurturing properties of our forests and his hope that an intact boreal forest may see us through the uncertain future.

He said, "It is through carving that I can find my peace and maintain a positive outlook. Whenever possible, my life partner and I venture into the wilderness to recharge our bond with Mother Nature, our source of inspiration and creativity."



Danielle Bruneau – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #100

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Bill C

August 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council features visual artist Danielle Bruneau. Currently working in acrylics, water colours, pen and ink, mixed media on everything from canvas to saw blades and cast iron frying pans, she has previously enjoyed working with stained glass (copper foil and soldered lead), wood working, as well as computer graphics, website design and photography.

Raised along the Winnipeg River, between St. Georges and Great Falls, she lived in Fort Nelson in Northern BC for 10 years. Since 2004, she has called Vancouver home, living on a 40' live-aboard boat moored at the mouth of the Fraser River and then residing in condos with mountain views, but ended up being mostly art space where she could eat and sleep. She said, "Presently, I'm in a renovated shuttle bus – chasing sunrises, sunsets and different landscapes."



Danielle Bruneau

In her "mobile" life, Bruneau finds inspiration "in everything from old buildings in rural settings to unique architecture in urban environments, how light and clouds play across the prairies, and in anything near the water, how it catches my attentions with its reflective quality."

Before she was even in kindergarten, her uncle, Art Vincent, gave her pencils and paper rolls from the mill. She sketched scenes from her grandparents' farm and watched her creative muse, Mr. Dress-Up, on her family's first black and white television. As a teenager, Bob Ross had her dreaming of when she would own a real easel. At Powerview School, her talented

art teacher, Sister Pauline Menard, taught her many skills in different media. “Although she would not give anyone an A, she did give a few of us the privilege of using the art room during lunch breaks to pursue projects.”



Bruneau also acquired knowledge from various online artists, citing Robert Genn’s newsletter and video tutorials. But she believes in “practice, practice, practice! The only way to learn art is to create art.”

At University of Manitoba, Bruneau studied for a bachelor’s degree in architecture, sharing professors from both Interior Design and Fine Arts. Afternoons included open studio with instruction and critique from professors, professional artists, and architects. She also worked on projects in pen and ink, water colour, clay and mixed media, and model building.

“My favourite professor, Claude De Forest, pushed us to develop our drawing and painting skills, with “plein air” outings and his famous Sketch Camp, a week on a Lake of the Woods island with various artists, instruction, practice, and group critiques from sunup to sundown.”

In the mid-1990’s, Bruneau instructed at Northern Lights College, teaching evening and weekend classes in website design. She also taught Adobe Page-Maker, MS Publisher, and other courses. She Bruneau loves gifting her art to friends and family and finds it rewarding when her hand-painted greeting cards have been framed. She also enjoys getting out on Monday nights with Winnipeg River Sketchcrawlers. On weekends, she concentrates on acrylic paintings, exploring ideas for a themed series.

“The artwork itself – the process, is an inspiration for me – putting what I see and how I see it onto media with a paint brush has its own satisfaction. The process of sketching and painting really helps me balance out a stressful career.”

Her artwork and photos can be viewed on Instagram. www.instagram.com/debruneau





Shirley Kurian – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #101

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Bill C

September 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council updates the profile of previously featured artist, Shirley Kurian. Although people may know her, first and foremost, as a talented photographer, she also likes to work with acrylic paint and alcohol ink, and enjoys creating notecards, canvases, framed photography, photo books and slide shows of her art.

Born and raised in Prawda, Manitoba, Kurian has lived on the Pinawa Bay near Lac du Bonnet for the past twenty years.

Although she has no formal training, she says, “I’ve taken classes and participated in workshops. I read a lot and use the internet to advance my skills.”

She has never done any instructing – “It’s not my thing” – but she has become well-known in many places for her photographs and artwork. It has been exhibited in numerous art shows and galleries, and many retail outlets sell her note cards.

Kurian gets inspired by the beauty of many things, found everywhere and anywhere around her: nature, light (“it’s all about the light”), colour, textures, travel, and people. She has visited various exotic places to create her striking photos and even went to Newfoundland for a photography tour. When asked about inspiration and motivation, she says, “For me, art is a craving. Some days, it is stronger than on other days. But it does not go away.”



Shirley Kurian

Since its inception, the Boreal Shores Art Tour has showcased her work and, by all accounts, her photographs of Manitoba landscapes, wildlife, and waterfowl have proven to be very popular with tour patrons. People also love her digitally-altered photography. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic, BSAT was cancelled this past summer but Kurian looks forward to the tour resuming in 2021. If anyone is interested in buying her work, it can be viewed and purchased at Pinawa's art gallery, ART 211, and Gwen Fox Gallery in Selkirk.

When about tips for budding artists, she says. "Find beauty in all things. Take time daily to create something that you are passionate about. And stay curious."



by Shirley Kurian



Shirley Kurian



by Shirley Kurian



by Shirley Kurian



Michael Luke – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #102

winnipegriverarts.com/michael-luke-focus-on-local-artists-issue-102/

Bill C

October 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council features author Michael Luke. Born in England, he came to Canada at ten years of age and grew up in Montreal, on the banks of the Richelieu River. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree, he worked as a researcher at a Montreal pharmaceutical company. Several years later, he moved, with his wife and newborn son, to a job with Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. Since this relocation, apart from two years in Victoria and two years in Deep River, Luke has lived in Pinawa.

As a teenager buying thirty-five cent paperbacks, Luke always fantasized about seeing his name on a book cover. When he retired, he decided to explore this dream and started writing. The self-published murder mysteries in his “Finding Cindy” series include: *The Perfect Candidate*, *The Morning Light Conspiracy*, *The Murder House*, *The Final Chapter*. He has also written two other books: *Great Science Fiction Stories You’ve Never Read* and *Some Great Enterprise*.



Michael Luke

At present, Luke is working on a sequel, about the further exploits of his long-time protagonist, Colin Therman. Although he enjoys the discipline and imagination of writing, he cherishes the reader feedback most of all. He says, “I’ve learned things from readers about Colin Therman that I never knew! Recently, I received a note from a reader who said my books took him back in time to when he travelled along the original Highway 44.”

This follow-up book takes place years later, when the hero opens the last message from ex-cop Harry Cunningham, whose past clues helped Therman but also led him into perilous situations. Luke says, “Colin will now find himself about to embark on his most dangerous

investigation yet, one that will expose a long dormant secret in the heart of the Whiteshell.”

While that story is gestating, Mike is also writing a series of short pieces set locally, two of them involving Colin Therman. One story describes a fatal accident involving pontoon boats. Or is it a murder? Another tells about a library cat who wants to disclose a crime taking place right under the noses of the staff. And there’s the story that asks what Game of Thrones fans may want to know – whatever happened to Drogon?

Luke encourages others with a story to get it into print or to go the eBook route. He says, “These days, for anyone interested, a range of helpful tools can assist in producing this kind of self-expression.”



Kelly Murray – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #103

winnipegriverarts.com/kelly-murray-focus-on-local-artists-issue-103/

Bill C

November 2020



For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council features visual artist Kelly Murray. Raised on a farm in southwest Manitoba, she attended school in Melita and then moved to Winnipeg, where she lived for twelve years. In 1994, she relocated to Powerview and, since 2005, she has lived near Stead.

Her favourite media include alcohol ink, watercolour paint, and acrylics. Other interests encompass many different forms and materials: sketching, sewing, cross-stitch, photography, scrapbooking, card making, creating and painting paper tole.

Murray says, “From my teenage years I always had a desire to make art, from coloring to fashion design. But, while I was raising our four daughters with my husband, my available time to create dwindled.”

Although she doesn’t have formal training, her art practice has progressed because she looks for different artistic experiences and workshops where she picks up tidbits of advice.

She says, “When I seek out a picture to sketch or paint, I look for images that speak to me or a design that will stretch my abilities. Also, to glean new methods, I love listening to and watching other artists.”

Despite her growing artistic expertise, she hasn't yet participated in an exhibit. But she has shared her creativity by leading classes in card making and scrapbooking. Recently, the Manitoba Arts Network selected Murray as one of five artists chosen to take part in the Rural Arts Mentorship Program (RAMP) in Eastern Manitoba. Led by professional painter Brenna George, RAMP is a four-weekend intensive experience with studio visits, designed to meet the needs of rural artists. The program will culminate with a virtual showing next March, and a physical showing at a Brandon art gallery, in September of 2021.



For the last two-and-a-half years, Murray has developed her skills with a group called River Sketchcrawlers. Every week in the summer, these artists from around Eastman choose a location and then go to that place and draw or paint for the whole evening.

When asked what motivates her, Murray says, “I find art and creating to be a release. Time passes quickly when I'm working on a project. And we have a beautiful area with such variety to inspire us.”





Shirley Cummer – Focus on Local Artists – Issue #104

winnipegriverarts.com/shirley-cummer-focus-on-local-artists-issue-104/

Bill C

December 2020

For this month, Winnipeg River Arts Council features visual artist, Shirley Cummer. Although her main interest used to be landscapes, she has been challenging herself to learn more about painting animals. Inspired by these results, she continues to work at expanding her artistic education.

Originally from Winnipeg, Cummer lived in the Lee River area for several years and her two children attended school in Lac du Bonnet. During this time, she worked in Winnipeg, as well as in Lac du Bonnet and Pinawa. In 2005, she moved back to Winnipeg, where she was employed by RCMP Depot Division, and met her husband, Brian, from Carman.



Shirley Cummer

In 2016, the couple retired and built their home in Pinawa. Shortly after they moved into their new house, they got the opportunity to check out the snowbird community of Weslaco, Texas, where Cummer joined a group of women who enjoyed painting together. At first, she started doing art because she wanted to depict the hypnotic path that her husband had described to her, as a method to deal with sleep issues.

She says, "This Weslaco painting group, led by Judy Anaka, was a life changer, and soon became a very addictive, wonderful hobby."

Prior to connecting with the Texas group, Cummer had no formal art training. However, she enjoyed other artistic hobbies such as sewing and crocheting. Motivated by her experiences down south, she signed up for classes at Pinawa Art Gallery, learning from well-known local artists and instructors, Vivian Thomson and Arlene Bohn.

Over the years, Cummer has worked in conventional careers, such as human resource manager, office manager, bank teller, and employment consultant. But, in 2015, she took training to be a professional stage hypnotist and certified hypnotherapist, specializing in smoking cessation. On different occasions, Cummer and her husband have performed for charities, fundraisers and corporations, presenting an act known as the “Brian and Rhonda Comedy Hypnosis.” Last November, they appeared in an episode of “Still Standing.” This popular CBC program featured Pinawa, as an example of a small town that has thrived after a setback.

In 2002, she entered an ART 211 contest and her oil painting of a swimming polar bear won first prize in the adult category. When she is not painting or helping people to quit smoking, she enjoys winemaking, travelling by pontoon on local waters, and visiting with eight grandchildren. She is also a member of Pinawa Art Gallery.

Cummer says, “I find painting to be a wonderful, relaxing hobby. I’ve created numerous pieces that I’ve gifted to friends and relatives for various special occasions.”