

TO LIVE A CREATIVE LIFE

BY ERICA NELSON



A SPACE COMPOSITION FOR REBECCA - 1978 HAYDN LLEWELLYN DAVIES, RCA

There are few things as special as the creative spirit that lives in each one of us. There is a spark deep down that, once ignited, can produce magical, outstanding things. The channel that we use as an outlet for this creativity can be just as unique as the product itself. The Art Gallery of Burlington (AGB) is a haven for the creatively inclined. The centre is dedicated to freeing minds, inspiring spirits and building the community through visual arts and crafts of all types.

The AGB is a not-for-profit charitable organization that first opened in 1978 with a driving goal of making the visual arts and creative experience accessible to individuals of all ages and abilities. The 44,000 sq. ft. facility has studio space for seven guilds and three exhibition spaces. It provides opportunities for creative experiences, discovery and hands-on learning to those in the community.

Artists from all across Canada have worked with the AGB to showcase their work over the years. Amongst them are the extremely talented Donna Fratesi, Mary Philpott and David Thai.



DONNA FRATESI

“IN MY EYES, PAINTING DONE WITHOUT EMOTION IS NOT A WORK OF ART.”



THEY PAVED PARADISE

Donna Fratesi is a local Burlington Artist who has made an impressive name for herself through her exquisite paintings. Donna has always had a strong creative drive and has dabbled in a number of different forms of art, but it wasn't until she came upon painting that she found her true passion. “I knew I always wanted to do something creative. I started out doing pottery, rug hooking and other creative things. It wasn't until I discovered painting that I was sure; it was as if I discovered where I belonged as well,” she explains. Donna is a member of the Burlington Fine Arts Association, as well as the Canadian Society of Watercolour Painters. Donna has studied under a long list of world-renowned master painters and her works of art can be found gracing the walls of homes in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. She has even gained

herself a prestigious spot in the archives of Queens Park in Toronto. Donna has always felt that positive recognition from her peers is the most satisfying praise. Donna's artistic style is rich and colourful. She specializes in still life, landscape and florals all inspired by her extensive world travels, in addition to her own personal garden. Viewers of her work can experience her emotion through her brush strokes and almost feel as if they are a part of the picture she is portraying. She has a loose technique that expresses joy in unexpected, everyday objects and landscapes. “I think art should be happy. There is so much unhappiness in the world; you have to have something that makes people feel good when they look at it. In my eyes, painting done without emotion is not a work of art.”

A painting of Donna's is currently on display at the AGB exhibition entitled “Burlington Urban and Rural” in celebration of the Burlington Fine Arts Association's 50th anniversary. The painting is entitled “They Paved Paradise” and eloquently depicts the well known Burlington Streets Pine and Pearl as they appeared before condo buildings replaced the homes that once occupied them. “I look around Burlington today and a lot of its charm and original beauty can't be seen anymore. They've taken away a lot of what was picturesque about Burlington. This painting is what I like to remember Burlington to be,” Donna explains. Donna's work is available for sale at Artspace in Downtown Oakville and for sale or rent at the AGB.



Photo: TEA Photography



MARY PHILPOTT

“THINGS IN NATURE INSPIRE THE CARVINGS ON MY TILE WORK AND VESSELS. IT IS ALL ABOUT MY SURROUNDING LANDSCAPES AND THOSE WHO INHABIT IT.”

Mary Philpott is a Port Perry, Ontario artist that has always been fascinated by the colour, narration and design of 19th century illuminated books, tapestries and architecture for many years. This is the driving inspiration behind her work in tile and sculpture. She uses tile and sculpture as a canvas for an imagined world that resembles what you may find inside a child's storybook. “The tangling of vines on an oak tree, the stems and leaves in a flower bed, the deer that quietly grazes before a sudden noise makes it leap away for cover, the fox that sits quietly amid the flora admiring a hare, that instinct urges him to hunt; these things in nature inspire the carvings on my tile work and vessels. It is all about my surrounding landscape and those who inhabit it.” Mary began her artistic journey studying Art History and Archeology at the University of Guelph where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She then continued her studies at the School of Craft and Design at Sheridan College. Over the years she's studied anthropology and archeology at McMaster and ceramics intensives at Alfred University in New York as well. “While I was studying at Guelph, I found my art history classes so fascinating and I began a love affair with that component of fine art. It wasn't until after I had finished school that I realized something was missing; I needed to get back into creating things rather than just studying them.” Mary also teaches and is a member of the Roycroft Renaissance Artisans, the Tile Heritage Organization, Hamilton Potters Guild, the Handmade Tile Association, the William Morris Society, the Tile and Architectural Ceramics Society of Britain and AIR Valluris France. Mary has recently crafted an installation for the AGB's Dan Lawrie Family Courtyard entitled “Murder of Crows.” The Arts and Crafts Movement of nineteenth century England was her inspiration behind the pieces. The pieces themselves are life-sized animal sculptures that many feel have turned the courtyard into “an enchanted garden, a sanctuary much like a medieval abbey cloister.” There is an unbelievable amount of honesty in Mary's exhibition and her work exudes a sense of beauty that can only be experienced in person. Her work is also included in the gallery's Permanent Collection of Canadian Contemporary Ceramics and was featured in the Exhibition Gothic in 2015.





DAVID THAI

“GLASS IS THE MEDIUM WHICH BEST EXPRESSES MY INNERMOST FEELINGS. LIKE A LIQUID, IT CAN BE FORMED ALMOST WITHOUT LIMITS.”

The creative spark inside David Thai did not come alive until a little later in his life. David moved to Canada in 1985. He was born in the city of Saigon, Vietnam before moving to a refugee camp in Malaysia. David often jokes that he and his family were, “the typical Chinese boat people from Vietnam.” Upon his arrival here in Canada he registered for high school English as a Second Language classes and eventually went on to study at Ryerson University and completed a degree in business. He went on to pursue the art of glass making at Sheridan College where he graduated in 2002. “I remember during my time in university, my friends and I would travel around nearby neighbourhoods in search of garage sales. We were always looking for glass. We were captivated and intrigued by glasswork, Murano glass in particular. It was around then that I realized that was what I really wanted to do with my life,” David reminisces.

Following his graduation, David was accepted as a full-time Resident of the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto where he also became a Glassblowing Instructor. It was around the same time that he began showcasing his work in galleries across Canada and the United States. He was fortunate enough to spend three years working at the Harbourfront Centre before moving to the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga, ON where he spent three years as a full-time Resident as well. David has also been partnering with the Art Gallery of Burlington for a number of years now to showcase and sell his glassworks. His signature glass bowls can be purchased there now. He also partners with Petroff Gallery in Toronto and West End Gallery at their two locations in Calgary, Alberta and Victoria, British Columbia.

While David will always be grateful to have worked with each of these organizations, his goal has always been to branch out on his own. In 2010, David opened his own glass studio called Studio One: Contemporary Glass in Georgetown, ON. He’s seen wonderful suc-



CHINESE LATERNS

cess with his studio so far and looks forward to continue that success in the coming years.

David’s inspiration is rooted in his background and his love of travel. He’s spent some time in Hong Kong and China, and lived in Malaysia for a while. He enjoys drawing inspiration and influence from these ancient cities. He is currently working on a new series of glasswork that uses designs and motifs from the First Emperor of China’s period.

“Glass is the medium which best expresses my innermost feelings. Like a liquid, it can be formed almost without limits.”