

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



A PUBLICATION OF  
THE OKANAGAN INSTITUTE  
NUMBER 21, FALL 2016  
EDITED BY KAREN CLOSE

KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF.  
LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.  
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# The Voices of Creative Aging

**CREATIVE AGING** is a powerful new social and cultural movement that is stirring the imaginations of communities and people everywhere.

**This is the first book to document the movement.**

Often called Sage-ing, Creative Aging takes many forms: academic, social and personal. It includes festivals, conferences, classes, group sessions and individual creative pursuits. The Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude was founded by the Okanagan Institute in 2011 to honour the transformational power of creativity. Intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing, the Journal presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement.

Sage-ing is about seeking – satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Aging can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to Know Thyself and contribute that

knowing to our culture is indeed one of life's highest purposes. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves. The creative journey into self is a strong aid to health and wellbeing

for the individual and to our culture. Creative Aging brings together more than 50 essays and galleries of images that showcase the power of the imagination expressed and enjoyed.

## CREATIVE AGING

STORIES FROM THE PAGES OF THE JOURNAL  
SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE  
SPIRIT, GRACE AND GRATITUDE  
EDITED BY  
Karen Close and Carolyn Cowan



# The Journal of Creative Aging

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NUMBER 21, FALL 2016  
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GRACE & GRATITUDE

A PUBLICATION OF THE

**Okanagan Institute**

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Cover image by Lisa Lipsett

## FROM THE EDITOR

With deep pleasure we launch *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* into its 6th year of publication. I think we're enduring because we're not New Age; we're old age with deep roots in human resolve. Almost 2500 years ago Aristotle proclaimed, "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." Encouraging creativity to become a lifestyle and sharing how creative exploration unlocks self knowing and gratitude is our mission. Know Yourself. "Be yourself; everyone is already taken." (Oscar Wilde jested). Love Yourself. Share yourself. Feeling the jolt of simple glee at doing from the heart is acting with creative spirit. Let the words of Leonardo da Vinci guide: "I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not

enough, we must do." How else can we know our own complexity I ask? How else can one fulfill a life? This 21st issue of the Journal brims with stories of fulfillment that a life deserves. We each deserve the fulfilment of telling our story. Our readers deserve to be inspired by each other. This is sage-ing.

Frequently I'm asked if this Journal is a blog, and I protest. Research suggests, "The purpose of writing blogs could be promotion of a product or service, awareness about social issues, information sharing about any subject or purely passion for writing." and yes, all that applies, but we are more. Like the Sage-ing International Guild we believe "Sage-ing is a spiritual practice that involves harvesting the wisdom of our lives, finding ways to transmit that wisdom

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as a legacy to future generations and to give back through service." Like them our goal is also "to help you achieve your best self as you age", but uniquely, we are not a business entity. We are two volunteers who use our editing and publishing skills to create a missive. We encourage creative collaboration and the sharing of stories. We're of a certain generation which values propriety in language and visual presentation. We like to give your stories a presence. We know the value the sages of ancient Greece put on creative expression. We seek a new renaissance in understanding creativity as the route to self knowing, and an inner liberation of what we each must share with the next generation. We look forward to receiving your stories and your wisdom.

– Karen Close, Editor

## SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO SAGE-ING

• **Article is to be related to aging and creativity, in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining wisdom and self awareness and/or the act of harvesting life's wisdom as a legacy for future generations.**

- Article to be attached as a document in .rtf format;
- 500 to a 1500 word maximum;
- Photos: Please attach each photo separately including: the writer's headshot photo and four or five photos, related to article . All photos should be attached in high resolution jpg format with a caption;
- Insert the word "**photo**" with its caption within the article where you would like each image placed (we'll try to honour this request as layout permits).
- Please include brief bio information (one or two short paragraphs) placed at the end of your article; this is meant to give the reader an idea of who you are, your passions and/or what you do and have done with your life that feels relevant to the article. Include contact info: email, website, blog address – whatever you want to include. For each journal, due date is the 10th of the month preceding release date. We release around the equinoxes and solstices. **For next issue due date is November 10**
- Email the article and photographs to [karensageing@gmail.com](mailto:karensageing@gmail.com)

Antiquity identified a sage as a wise person ... wisdom is a form of goodness, and is not scientific knowledge but another kind of cognition.

– Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1246b

# CREATIVE AGING

## Siegfried Beckedorf



Siegfried the gardener

I believe there are “Diamonds Hidden” in our capability to wake up to creative aging. There is an inner something, an intuition, inherent in all of us to carry on an active and creative life into our years when physical and mental abilities may be impeded due to age.

Conscious Living, living in the present moment, being in awe of natural beauty and enhancing this with song and music, led me to create a park-like surrounding of our river frontage. The awareness of being part of the energy of nature, its power and its mysteries, provides me with an inner strength, a sense of us all being one with the universal intelligence. Waking up to the potential of enjoying life beyond our active years, has been the subject of many great authors worldwide.

At the age of 87 years I enjoy gardening as well as the desire to write down my experiences. In my book *Diamonds Everywhere* I am trying to express my waking up to an inherent creative energy in motion. My wife played the guitar, and sang with the sounds of the Elbow River in the background.



Ursula composed the Bragg Creek Song and translated country music from German into English and vice versa. The sounds of music and the sounds of water rushing down the Elbow River was also an inspiration to enjoy creative aging. My sense of creativity continued after the shock and sadness of her death in September 2015.

Inviting visitors to share our natural beauty, the sounds of music and the river was appreciated by friends from the city and overseas when we gathered with neighbors at family reunions. There was an international atmosphere to our gatherings. Creative aging was a subject discussed by many in our age group.

In our early 20's my two brothers and I were filled with an urge to venture away from Germany and explore Western Canada. Before leaving, in 1951, I was given a journal by an elderly friend with the words, “You will have many experiences worthwhile writing down for future reference”. I felt this trip was to be a time I was on a journey, with a sense of adventure, before settling down in the business world of Hamburg. Our plan was to return to Germany within two years. After spending some time in the Okanagan Valley, picking fruit and working in sawmills, we



were on our way back to Germany via Calgary. At a dance during the Stampede I asked a young lady for a dance. She had arrived from Germany a few months earlier and worked at the Arthur Murray School of Dance. She danced beautifully and sang along with the band. I was in awe and forgot all about returning to Germany. We got married in 1955. My brothers had similar experiences. For me the experience of a life of song and music lasted over 60 years.

Looking back I see the signs of making space for new ways of living and being aware of who I am, began with the arrival of my wife's mother from Germany in 1955. She was partly paralyzed in 1942, and required our attention. She brought books covering mental positivism with emphasis on finding one's true self deep within. Omi's wisdom and her smiling while being physically hindered, also in her speech, was very inspiring to our family and loved by our children. Reading these books I felt a sense of being on a journey into a new way of thinking, trusting intuition, a way of ancient wisdom coming alive. It coincided with a growing movement along this line that was starting in California.

We purchased land and moved to the Bragg Creek area in 1969. My wife, Ursula, joined by her twin sister Brigitta who was married to my brother, became involved in building a resourceful and artistic community in Bragg Creek. Ursula had a leading role in the Performing Arts. The Beckedorf Twins entertained at many events - the Calgary Stampede and also with Wilmar Lar and his Irish Rovers, as well as in the Bragg Creek area. In the meantime I got involved in land development and International business.

Frequent traveling on business, and on pleasure, brought us in contact with foreigners in many countries and we could explore their lifestyles and their cultures. We attended lectures and conferences presented by great authors in the field of ancient and new wisdom. Great thinkers of the past and present inspired me with quotes that I enjoy sharing:

Top: the Elbow River in summer  
Middle: the Elbow River in fall  
Above: on our river frontage



Top: Ursula and Brigitte singing Bragg Creek song

Above: newspaper clipping

“To be yourself in a world that is trying to make you something different, is the greatest accomplishment.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“It is not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.” ~ Henry David Thoreau.

“The moment one definitely commits oneself, Providence, Nature’s guiding force, moves too . All of sort of things occur to help that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising to one’s favor. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius and power.” ~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

“Be Curious, not judgmental.” ~ Walt Whitman.

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” ~ Albert Einstein.

“Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of nature and, therefore, part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.” ~ Max Planck.

I know, and I acknowledge, our society in general is struggling with the concept of stillness. To habitually stop in our tracks and smell the flowers is one description of slowing down in our busyness, putting an overloaded mind at rest. Meditating, recharging one’s battery, or what I call “checking in on my state of consciousness once in awhile” is a challenge in this age of a rapidly expanding world of science and technology. In *The Art of Stillness*, a TED book of 75 pages written in 2014 by Pico Iyer, a British-born essayist and novelist based in Japan and California, this world traveler, makes a case for the pleasures of stillness. I quote:

“At some point, all the horizontal trips in the world stop compensating for the need to go deep into somewhere challenging and unexpected; movement makes most sense when grounded in stillness.”

In an age of speed, I began to think, nothing could be more invigorating than going slow. In an age of distraction, nothing could feel more luxurious than paying attention. And in an age of constant movement, nothing is more urgent than sitting still.

I anticipate the concept of CREATIVE SAGE-ING finds more acceptance in educational fields, including children at the elementary level. Encouraging not only seniors but people of all walks of life to look at the benefits around them is important. We see the senior segment in our society growing in large numbers. Creative Aging is looking at peace of mind and greater well

being for the elderly. Creative Aging could have tremendous potential for the public and private health systems everywhere to streamline and economize.

In September 2015, **Siegfried Beckedorf** made a promise at his wife Ursula's Celebration of Life ceremony. He promised her, and the large numbers gathered, that he would complete the book, which she had began, about their life. He published *Diamonds Everywhere* in the spring of 2016. He translated his grief into a creative celebration. At 87, he is now starting his second book and is absorbed in living.

*"Diamonds Everywhere* offers everything from historical facts to international adventure to meditation on life - all delivered with honesty, humour and an obvious love of life and family." ~ Barb Howard, 2015/16 President of the Writers Guild of Alberta

## AS I'VE WATCHED SIGY SAGE-ING Ute Freitag

One morning there was this phone call from Cousin Sigi in Bragg Creek, Alberta, "I come to visit you in two weeks. I will stay 12 days!"

Sigi is always welcome. I love talking to him over the phone and in person. We always talk about our philosophies and how we try to live our lives in the most meaningful way. We had endless wonderful family parties at his place. "When nobody else comes we are 62," he used to say - meaning that this was only the family.

Sigi is now 87 and he's had to face really dramatic years since I first met him 19 years ago. He buried his granddaughter and one of his daughters a few years ago, the house he wanted to move into burned down, and his wife died last September. That was the reason he couldn't have his knee operation two years ago, because it was important to him to care for his wife so they could both stay together in their house they both loved so much. Even though he was in a lot of pain, he decided he wanted to stay with his beautiful wife in their home, right to the very end. "I can look after her much better than every nurse," he used to say. Since

then he has buried two of his four brothers leaving him with only one brother here in the Okanagan, and that was the reason for his visit out here; he wanted to see his last surviving brother again.

I knew he'd had his knee operation only five weeks earlier, but there he was cheerful with lots of energy and always a smile on his face. A man of his age not needing glasses nor a hearing aid, only a little walking stick to give him more comfort. Amazing, how can a man live through so much, be so full of energy and full of new plans enjoying every moment of his life? Of course he misses his wife and the members of his family he had already to bury. He, like everybody else has to live from moment to moment and try to make it all right. Even now, at the end of his life span, he lives his life to the fullest; he enjoys every moment, sees diamonds everywhere, and touches the souls of so many people. Sigi is everybody's darling!

While he was here he was sneaking out of the house early in the morning, then coming home late in the afternoon. He did long journeys with his car and never lost his way even without a map. He never needed a nap and he was watching the shooting stars with us in the late evening until midnight. Quite frankly, by the end of the day my husband and I were more tired than

he was. How does this man do this? The answer is to keep yourself busy, focus on something you really love to do, have an interest in the world around you and be open and curious. Don't kill your time. Fill your time with something very beautiful that makes you get up in the morning full of joy and curiosity and never say to yourself or anybody else, "In my stage of life I don't do this and that". We are never too old to try something new. Sigi just finished writing his first book and he is already deep into his second one. He plans book readings, tries to meet people who understand what he is doing, but he can also sit at the river in the back of his house enjoying the leisure time just being grateful to be around. He is still in the real estate business of buying and selling land. He really loved what he did for a living and he likes to talk about it.

He came over from Germany to Canada with six siblings and he will be the last one to close the gate. He has enough reasons to be depressed, but he chose to be a happy person as long as he is around. Not everybody is so fortunate to have his good health, but we all have the choice how we want to live our final stage of life. Sigi chooses a way we all admire. He is an inspiration for all of us.

# KNOWING CREATIVITY



Margo with new work

## Margo Yacheshyn

There's this thing called creativity. Many people confuse it with artistic talent: "I'm not creative, I can barely draw a stickman." While the two often go hand-in-hand, they are quite different concepts.

In art school, I often compared myself to my classmates who seemed to think so far outside the box I don't think they even had a box to start with. I knew I had talent, but I never felt quite as clever in my approach to projects. I was too literal, too serious. Too emotionally-driven. I equated their quirky perspectives and innovative solutions with being more creative than my angry vagina-paintings.

And I was right. Sort of.

Accessing our own creativity is something that can be learned; five years of art school taught me that. I came out a much different person, although I didn't realize it at the time. I went in as a sensitive young woman with a talent for drawing and came out with thickened skin and new artistic skills. Best of all, my brain had been rewired in such a way that I've spent the 17 years since developing new pathways of creativity.

In my second year of art school, my drawing instructor Don Mabie (a.k.a. Chuck Steak) introduced our class to Artist Trading Cards (ATC)—which he had discovered earlier that year while in Zurich. He assigned us nine cards for the following week's first-ever Calgary trading session. I made 200.

I immediately got caught up in the thrill of making, trading, collecting and sorting these tiny pieces of art. These little gems were the perfect platform for working out ideas in a small format while appealing to my strong desire to both collect and sort.

When I moved to Kelowna after graduating from art school, I wanted to find a way to keep up the momentum. I joined the Alternator Gallery and spent the next few years with fellow artist Shauna Oddleifson trying to recreate the thriving Calgary ATC scene in the Okanagan. Although it never took off here like it did in Calgary, it was a great experience. I gave a number of presentations and workshops, and curated two exhibitions from my collection. Best of all, we developed a community that brought together artists and other creative-types from various disciplines. We'd meet in studios, galleries, coffee shops and even pubs and martini bars to make and trade cards over libations and conversation, always trying to lure more people into the fascinating world of ATC—to which I dedicated 10 years of my life.

In those first years living in Kelowna, I managed to keep a somewhat active studio practice. Alongside ATC, I produced new sculptural work and



Top: Artist Trading Cards

Middle: Artist Trading Card exhibition. FINA Gallery, UBC Okanagan, 2006.

Above: *De-formed*. Group show at Alternator Gallery, 2006. Beeswax, hemp twine, flax, rabbit fur, gauze, willow branches.

had a few exhibitions. But career, marriage and home ownership made it impossible to continue and so I reluctantly gave up my studio.

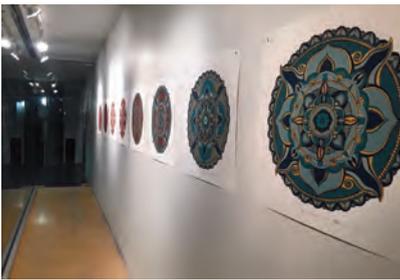
It was a difficult decision to make, and not one without misgivings and some resentment. While I watched some of my classmates continue with an active studio practice, receive grants, do residencies and continue on to graduate school, I witnessed my inner artist-self slowly dry up, and I feared I would never be able to resuscitate it.

But my drive to create was strong. I needed to find a way to channel my impulse to express myself, and a way to share it with others. I got a camera and began capturing compositions from my surroundings. I took drawing breaks at work to document a particular moment of disarray on my desk. I threw myself into gardening and cooking, and I played the violin until my fingers hurt and my arm cramped. I wrote some. And I added craft projects with beads and sewing. But still I worried that *the artist* might have left the building never to return.

Then I had my daughter.

Everything changes when you become a parent. My daughter was a terrible sleeper and I spent the first couple of years in a sleep-deprived daze. Yet, during my maternity leave, I used every slice of her nap time to squeeze in one creative project or another. I should note: I'm impatient and like to dive into a project, plowing through until I'm (almost) done. But this new life prompted me to stop at inopportune times—often. I then realized if I focused on completing a project, I became more irritated by interruptions. But by making a simple adjustment in thinking, I could comfortably set my work aside, knowing I could come back to it later. Fairly elementary thinking, true, but it took me a while to figure it out. But that insight didn't immediately translate into the rest of my life. It was a slow process.

When the emergence of ideas for art projects crept into my consciousness, it dawned on me that maybe my artist self hadn't died the slow death I had initially thought. It simply went dormant. And having long-ago realized I was never going to be an art star, I came to accept that taking a hiatus from being an artist wasn't the end of the world. That was a huge epiphany. And



Top: *Drawing a Day* series. 3"x5". 2010. Pen and ink on paper.

Middle: *Mandala For My Muse*. Silkscreen prints, in collaboration with Alden Alfon. 22"x22". 2015.

Above: Untitled work in progress at Studio 111. 2016. Beeswax, hemp twine, rabbit fur, flax, on abaca paper.

an equally huge relief.

I embraced all the creative ways I was living my life outside of art-making: at work as a graphic designer; as a parent educating and interacting with my daughter; in the ways I planted my garden, or prepared and presented our meals.

And during the *I-think-my-artist-might-be-dead* period that stretched nearly 10 years, I was, actually, making art: I did a lot of drawing. Little drawings. Decorative drawings. While they seemed frivolous to me, they appealed to many, including Calgary artist Alden Alfon, who I collaborated with to produce three series of gorgeous silkscreen prints.

As the great understanding seeped into my psyche, it occurred to me the drawings I was making were an extension of who I am, no matter how trivial or decorative they seemed to me. I have a compulsion to draw; I have a need to express myself; I have technical skills, and an interesting perspective both compositionally and in thinking. That, in my books, adds up to being a creative person—and an artist. Not only was *my artist* not dead, she wasn't even asleep, but guiding me along, creatively navigating me through a period when art could only be made in bite-sizes.

My daughter is now almost eight. I've spent the past four-and-a-half years as a half-time single parent. My time is more crunched than ever, yet I find myself filling it with a greater number of creative projects. Last summer I did a local three-month artist residency, and another brief one this spring. I had great studio spaces to spread out and create in. And I confirmed that my artist-self is alive and well: she required some coaxing to fully emerge, but once we got reacquainted, it was bliss.

I look around at people outside my immediate circle and I realize just how fortunate I am to have such a wide variety of creative ways to express myself, live my life, and help my daughter continue to grow her creativity.

Born in Winnipeg, **Margo Yacheshyn** was raised in equal parts in Winnipeg and Calgary. She moved to the Okanagan Valley after receiving her BFA (Drawing, 1999) from the Alberta College of Art and Design. Margo lives in Kelowna with her daughter and works as a graphic designer at the University of British Columbia. She continues to fill her own and her daughter's life with creativity.

# JOYFUL FREEDOM

## Dianna Joy Watson



Years ago I left my marriage of 30 years, and embarked on a rich journey of self discovery, filled with trepidation intermixed with waves of excitement. It was challenging to set out alone at this autumn stage of my life, yet I knew I had to listen to my soul's calling for something more meaningful, something that would bring more joy and fulfillment into my life.

I quickly learned to check in with my desires and needs, and soon discovered the benefits of giving myself freedom from self imposed obligations, expectations of others, holding myself ransom with assumptions of what others might think, and caretaking others' feelings above mine. The greatest tool I discovered was the gift of the question. How do I feel about this? Is that my belief or someone else's? What can I do today that will bring me joy and soul nourishment? I kept searching for MY truth and honouring that as much as possible each day. It was like getting to know a new friend and I marveled at my blossoming and depth of self-realization over time.

Through this fascinating journey I discovered my inner child who never spent enough time playing and was still longing for that joyous experience. When I discovered this quote I really resonated with it: "You're never too old to have a happy childhood". I put this mantra into my new toolbox as I went searching into this intriguing and mysterious stage, feeling my way like a spelunker without a flashlight. Eventually, I came to understand I hold the light within that shines my way.

Along my self-discovery passage, I uncovered this passionate love of music I had tucked away in the dark recesses of my soul. How was I going to fulfill that desire? By focusing on this question, I attracted a man who was a Latin dance instructor and I enthusiastically took up the dance. Soon we became dance partners, co instructing and dancing in public performances. The blissful joy I felt swaying to the music confirmed I was on the right path. All levels of my being were radiating with intense joy, fulfilled soul nourishment, and a grand excitement for life I never imagined was possible!

This fun loving joyous expression became a catalyst unlocking a creativity door that had seldom been opened in my past. The domino effect nudged me into other aspects of musical enjoyment when I spent more time djembe drumming with like hearted friends. This touched an even deeper chord. Drumming is such a primal sound, like the heartbeat of Mother Earth. Drumming became a bridge to me playing the conga drum and percussion in a band I've been with for over 3 years called Rainbow Rhythms. We play joyous upbeat new world music, and I'm excited to have another place to express my musical creativity and joy. This stepping stone has inspired me to improve my singing skills so I took up voice lessons over a year ago. Each aspect of music enjoyment I embrace brings me to another level and depth

Dance performance by Dianna and partner





Top: Dianna & friend drumming  
 Middle: Communing with Dolphins  
 Above: Mom & I wearing glasses/me with musical glasses

**Dianna Joy Watson**, Recreational Engineer, is a public speaker, international facilitator, published author, dancer and musician. She has traveled to over 65 countries and prefers the Kelowna lifestyle where she continues to fulfill her desires and passions for music and life. Her friends just call her "Dianna Joy".  
 iamdianna@shaw.ca

of blissful joy, rich fulfillment, and a deeper appreciation for my love of music and life!

Once on this free and joyful pathway, I questioned what else would bring me joy? The greatest YES was in response to an invitation to swim with non-captive dolphins in Hawaii. After attending the first dolphin retreat called *Communing With Dolphins*, that Joy door was definitely activated and I returned 7 times and this easily became my highest and most thrilling annual Joy fix. Those amazing creatures were such wonderful role models in play, love and family connection. My inner child was over the moon, ecstatic with delight at being so close in their presence as they taught me to play and be in the moment. The beautiful blessing is that my mind can always retrieve those blissful memories if I'm ever feeling blue.

Since my early teens, my teachers and I recognized my natural gift for writing. In my adult years, I developed a tendency to put that desire on the back burner for other priorities. Whenever I did write an article that was published, or poetry I gifted to others, it brought me such satisfaction and pride. When I came to recognize this fulfilling feeling more clearly, I now find myself writing with much enthusiasm more often. I recently co-authored a book, which became an international bestseller, called "Inch By Inch Growing In Life" <http://inch-by-inch-book.com/the-co-authors/dianna-watson>.

Now I'm writing my own book on the art of hugging and finding such joy and excitement in the process. This writing experience has also opened more creative doors that seem to be somehow interlinked with my creative musical expressions. Like a lotus blossoming, I am constantly discovering more aspects of myself along each stage in this university of life.

I have learned many valuable tools along the Freedom Road. I would love to share some of these with you. They have all been instrumental in my feeling more joy, harmony and peace every day, regardless of circumstances around me.

Be present in the moment & let go of those stories from the past, especially the unfulfilling ones. Let young children be your teacher.

Give up worrying about the future that hasn't even happened. Be a thought cop. Futurizing wastes energy and creates unnecessary stress.

All we have is today and this is a precious gift. That's why they call it "the Present".

Find at least 5 things you're grateful for each day and keep a gratitude journal. This will change your life.

Every day I start by asking my inner child what it would like to do for fun today and I book it in. Nourishing our inner child is paramount to staying young at heart.

When I gave myself permission to be free and happy, I unleashed my soul's calling for Joy. Now I can hear that call loudly and clearly, with a lovely melody I might add, and I respond enthusiastically each day. In the autumn of my life I recognize I have come full circle when I am able to live my life in the moment and feel the Joy in the many blessings within each day.

# RUSSIAN SUMMER

## Ellen Ryan



In the heat of the Cold War, the USA and the USSR offered scholarships for students to learn each others' language and culture.

So it was that I spent the summer of 1968 in the Soviet Union. This was a memorable time in Europe because Alexander Dubek was decentralizing Czechoslovakia, opening up the country after 20 years of 'occupation'. Like many Czech expatriates, my thesis advisor was headed to Prague to visit his mother for the first time since his defection years earlier. Journalists were writing article after article about whether this was the beginning for all of Eastern Europe or whether there would be a Soviet crackdown.

This was a time of transition for me. Just before graduating from Brown University that June, I became engaged to marry a Canadian and committed to moving to Canada within a few years. I would begin PhD studies at the University of Michigan in the fall.

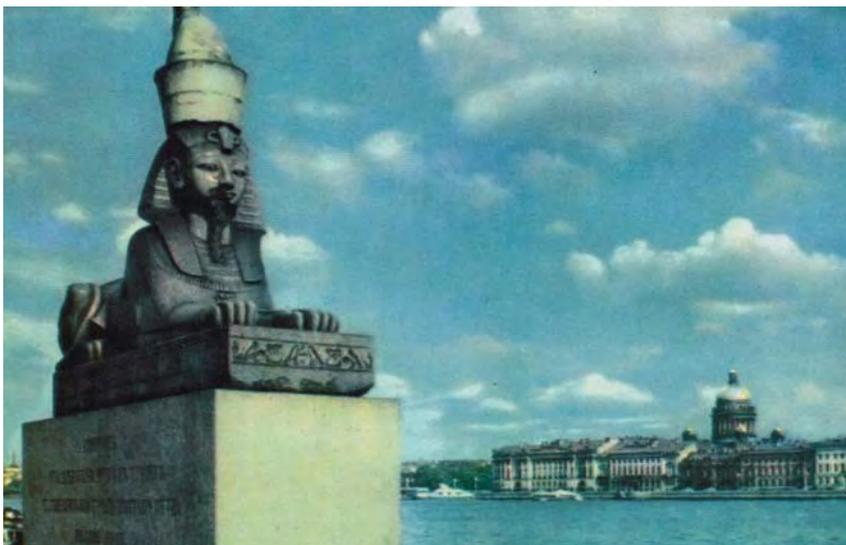
I chose to study Russian in college because I realized in my teens that the Red Scare of the 50's and 60's was at least partly propaganda. Even though I had only studied the language for two years, I was keen to travel, to see for myself. Our group of 100 Americans studied Russian for six weeks at the University of Leningrad, with afternoon cultural lectures and weekend tours. We took advantage of the low cost for cultural activities central to communist policy to attend the opera and ballet and to visit the Hermitage Museum repeatedly. Then we embarked on one-week tours of Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa.

This being my first travel outside North America, I had much to learn. In addition to the formal InTourist activities, we interacted with students in the university residence, went on picnics, walked the city, attended student

parties with the locals. Russian individuals (younger and older) would initially greet us with a standard opening – "We disagree with your country's policy on Vietnam... but we know you have little say in what your government does." – then be friendly and helpful. I did not know enough Russian to discuss politics. So I could not tell them about my recent protesting on campus and my view that citizens in a democratic country are indeed responsible for their government's behaviour.

Foreshadowing my eventual

Entrance to Leningrad (now again, St. Petersburg)





Exploring

specialty in gerontology, I relished visits with my friend Maryusha's babushka in the tiny apartment where stacks of books held a board for her dining table. Maryusha's parents fled during the devastating Siege of Leningrad 25 years earlier. Growing up in the USA, Maryusha had long prepared for this student trip to get to know her babushka. We sipped glasses of hot tea in traditional metal holders while listening to stories of family, loss, courage, secrecy, hidden radios for Radio Free Europe, and reading, always reading.

This cross-cultural summer launched my citizenship in the world. Not only did I learn from Russians and Czechs that summer, but also through conversations with my American peers from different universities, areas of the country, and social class. From students of Slavic background, like Maryusha, we heard stories of emigration by choice or in flight from war or threat of imprisonment for political views.

My husband and I moved to Canada with our three children after a decade. Over the years we travelled with them to other countries. No surprise that our son Kevin went to Stockholm for the adventure, met his Slavic/Swedish wife Anna, and is raising his family in Sweden.

The world is a gentler, smaller place when individuals from disparate regions talk with one another. Now, at a time when world tensions mount again, and politicians speak of building physical and ideological walls, I think it is important to revisit and share my early experiences in international dialogue.

The two poems on the next page emerged from reliving my Russian Summer. The first poem describes one particular walk in Leningrad (now again, St. Petersburg). The second poem tells how we met Czech students in Odessa and our emotional overnight train ride together to the international airport in Kiev. We did learn later that the Czechs arrived home safely, after a day of detention while officials tried to decide what to do with them.

**Ellen B. Ryan** is professor emerita at McMaster University, member of Tower Poetry Society <http://towerpoetry.ca/> and The Ontario Poetry Society [www.theontariopoetrysociety.ca](http://www.theontariopoetrysociety.ca), co-editor of *Celebrating Poets over 70* [www.celebratingpoetsover70.ca](http://www.celebratingpoetsover70.ca), and host of the *Writing, Aging and Spirit* website [www.writingdownouryears.ca](http://www.writingdownouryears.ca). Along with talented colleagues, she fosters writing of life stories and poetry among older adults.

## Reminiscences by Ellen Ryan

### Butter Butter

On Nevsky Prospekt  
Czars' gracious boulevard  
we American language students walk  
in dreary grey Leningrad  
where clothes never dry.

The summer of misplaced forgiveness  
for U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War  
"We know you are not responsible  
for what your country does."

My friend Linda commands vocabulary  
her Russian intonation flows.  
She cannot roll her r's.  
Budding linguist and psychologist  
I know only tourist phrases, baby grammar  
yet fall upon a trick to teach my comrade.

While we stroll in colorful capitalist clothes  
gaudy among government-issue drab  
long-ago outdoor lessons come to mind.  
Pépère Morin taught me to roll my r's  
while tending his vegetable garden.  
What glee when I could pronounce his  
name  
en français, the French-Canadian trill.

"Butter butter, better butter"  
Say the words  
speak fast  
lengthen middle sound  
repeat middle sound  
"bu\*\*er bu\*\*er, be\*\*er bu\*\*er."

By the time we reached the Hermitage  
Linda was rolling her r's  
French-Canadian path  
to pure Winter Palace rolled r  
in elegant old St. Petersburg.

### Prague Spring<sup>1</sup> Ends in Odessa

Naive American language learners  
we land in Odessa after rainy Leningrad  
to holiday on the Black Sea

Sunrise aerobics on the beach  
comrades stretch toward coming light  
smooth waves glint among rocks

As we return along grand boulevard  
a crowd spills outside our hotel  
we shiver despite bright warmth

Engineering students from Prague  
hold American radios to their ears  
our festive mood vanishes

Radio Moscow intones  
"We'll end democracy's oppression.  
Czechs invite our tanks."

That night both groups board airport train  
Radio Prague squawks  
new hiding place each hour

Tank locations named in turn  
Czech youth exclaim "My street" "My  
street"  
In anguish they talk of home

Parents followed rules  
eyes kept forward  
left secret-telling to the old

Aspirations were preserved  
sovereign republic recalled  
possibilities sparked

In these voices we hear Grandma  
enshrining time before time  
when all could walk free

<sup>1</sup>Prague Spring - 1968 Democracy Move-  
ment in Czechoslovakia

# FINDING MYSELF

## Jenny Pound



With my brilliant daughter

A little more than twenty months ago my whole world changed, with one knock to the head. It didn't sound like a knock, more like a clap of thunder, as a metal door came crashing down slamming me on the head, leaving me unconscious on the floor. It seems like so long ago now, but I remember that sound like it was yesterday, everything else now seems a bit hazy.

For the first day or two I slept a lot, and it seemed like nothing would take away the pain of the headache or the dizziness and nausea from the concussion; yet my symptoms were expected and explained as normal by the ER doctors. It wasn't until approximately the third day that my husband started to notice I began to stutter and repeat my words; other symptoms began to develop such as: sensitivity to light and noise, memory and concentration issues, problems with decision making as well as anxiety. I will not bore you with details of tests, doctors, etc but the end result was that I have a (mild TBI) traumatic brain injury and I'm very lucky it's not worse.

Since nearly the beginning of my journey with TBI I have worked weekly with two amazing therapists who have helped me to develop and utilize strategies to cope with daily life. These strategies keep me from falling apart as a mom and a wife, and help me stay on track. Unfortunately, there was one thing neither my Occupational nor my Speech therapist could help me with, and that was my self confidence; any amount of confidence in myself I had had was gone. I was so embarrassed by who I had become and how I sounded. If I were in public and saw a friend or someone I knew, I would hide or turn and walk in the other direction. When it came to placing an order or requesting assistance, my husband and daughter always spoke for me, my daughter became my stand-by translator. I even stopped communicating to most people via telephone and now have converted the majority of my conversations to text or email. I felt as though I had lost myself, and as though I had let my husband and young daughter down. I went from being a full-time working mom, loving wife and a caregiver to the two people I love most in this world to feeling like I was a burden and an embarrassment. I felt less than...

My brilliant daughter suggested I begin helping out at her school once a week. Initially I had major reservations, as I'd have to wear my earplug because of the noise. I feared I might make mistakes or not understand, and I might see someone I knew there, but in spite of my reservations, I reached out to one of her old teachers and made arrangements. The kids had so many gut wrenching questions and honest comments, I nearly stopped going, but after the first few weeks bonds started forming and slowly I started to feel like the new me might be okay. These small beautiful souls accepted me for who I was, I felt loved and welcomed and secure enough to talk freely with the children regardless of how I sounded. As a result of working in the school with these children, I gained



Top: marble painting 1  
Above: marble painting 2

enough confidence to slowly start talking to more friends and family.

School let out, and after several weeks off, my daughter and I had started to get the summer blues. My mom invited us to an ongoing drop-in art program at the Rotary Centre For the Arts that runs Tuesdays. Ordinarily I would decline - what if it's too noisy? What if I don't understand? What if I had to talk to someone? But something inside of me said yes before I had a chance to chicken out! My daughter is a creative, talented young budding artist and was delighted at spending a whole morning with just mom and grandma!

When we arrived that first Tuesday, I had forgotten my earplugs and found it pretty noisy. I stood in the back hallway, covering my ears waiting for everyone to get settled and debating on sneaking out to the car. Everyone settled in and quieted down the chairs stopped screeching on the floor and this lovely woman started to speak. The woman begins to speak of "pARTicipACTION" or art in action, as well as art and creativity as it relates to health and aging - her words were wise and genuine. We were instructed to paint how we were feeling, or whatever else we wanted, but to be loose and free. With the paint as part of the theme for the week the idea was to paint expressionistically. For approximately two hours I stopped thinking and feeling and just gave into the art. I will be the first to admit, I am a creative person but I am not artistic. And there is a difference as our culture sees it. At the end I was left with two canvas pictures, one how I was feeling to start fuzzy headed and one a loose representation of my daughter, something that makes me happy. My mother being of pure artistic talent, painted two lovely canvas' and my daughter, the scientist, experimented with different techniques to create unique effects. I was so proud to have spent the morning celebrating art with these two beauties.

The end of the class was the part I wasn't warned about, and was in no way prepared for; not only did everyone display their work but they discussed the pieces as well. "No way! This was not happening!" I remember thinking in sheer panic. A thousand thoughts raced through my head about how to escape. All I could hear was my heart in my head as I sat in silence waiting for my turn, I felt as if I were waiting to be mowed down by a freight train, all the while my beautiful daughter sat beside me squeezing my hand in support. When the group leader, had made her way down to my first painting and asked for me to take my turn, I shook my head and mumbled no in humiliation. By the time she had gotten to my second painting, my daughter had leaned into me and said "mommy, you can do this" and gave my hand one more big squeeze. I took a huge breath and gave it everything I had, I rambled on about both of my paintings, I have no idea what I said or how bad I sounded, but what I will keep with me forever was the look on both my mom and my daughter's face - the look of pride, the tears in my mom's eyes and my daughter softly whispering, "see mom I told you you could do it! I love you"

I have only been to the Tuesday drop-in art class two times now, but plan to continue on. I am so thankful that I found it, for in doing so, I just might be discovering a little bit more of myself. At my second class we painted with marbles and the intention was to 'shake, rattle and roll'. I got right into it.

# HANDS UP FOR CREATIVE AGING DAYS

**Anita Forster**

“Hands up all those who want to do a gig again this year at the *Creative Aging Day*.”

(As aging adults we take comfort in childish rituals like hand-raising)

This question was put to us by the conductor of *The Merrie Pipers*, a recorder orchestra. For several years this group of fifteen senior players has been meeting and practising once a week at a Kelowna retirement residence where they kindly provide us with one of their common-rooms and a trolley of coffee and tea for our fifteen minute break.

In answer to the question about the gig all hands went up! We had performed last year at the event and had found it to be an enjoyable experience. We have an extensive repertoire of pieces at our musical fingertips, so our conductor had no problem creating a varied programme - classical, jazz, folk, something to please every taste. We had been invited to give two half-hour performances, one in the morning and another in the afternoon.

So, on *Creative Aging Day* 2016, we packed our music stands, music binders, and recorders, and headed for Kelowna’s Rotary Centre for the Arts. We play four-part music arrangements, so we have a variety of recorders: soprano (like the ones used in elementary schools), alto (bigger than soprano and with a more mellow tone), tenor (bigger still and deeper) and bass (even bigger and deeper). One member has a contra-bass recorder which is very large, is made of wood, and stands about four feet tall. The player of this

expensive German instrument is often asked, much to his amusement, if he made it himself.

We set up in one of the centre’s art rooms and played our morning performance to a small audience. This was a little disappointing, but we enjoy playing and those who were listening seemed to enjoy our efforts. I guess that we had too much competition from all the other interesting activities going on that day!

Now we had some free time to have lunch at the centre’s excellent

*The Merrie Pipers at Creative Aging Day*





cafeteria and to wander around and check out the other participants who were aging creatively and demonstrating their skills and crafts. I enjoyed watching the *Okanagan Cloggers*, a group of enthusiastic dancers.

I chatted with a lady who had co-written a book with her friend about their adventurous travels.

There was a table of calligraphy penners displaying their beautiful writing skills. There were spinners, weavers, and jewellery makers.

There was a gallery of paintings by local artists, where we could enter a draw to win a collaborative painting, created by many people.

A group of ukulele players lined up to play after the *Merrie Pipers*. I approached one table dedicated to diversity, and manned by two charming senior gentlemen who offered me a cookie designed to illustrate diversity.

I thought it entirely inappropriate to ask my usual opening question, "How long have you been doing this?". So, I smiled politely, accepted a cookie, and moved on to the next table.

Our afternoon performance drew another small audience, but we just enjoyed the opportunity to play together and then to marvel at the variety of talents and skills of Kelowna's seniors.

I am sure that next year, when our conductor says, "Hands up all those who want to do the Creative Aging Day gig!", there will be a unanimous show of hands. We can always be optimistic that we will attract a larger audience!

"Collaborative Painting encourages a group to work together on a canvas without discussion or preplanning. The process encourages respect for uniqueness and creativity. Displayed was a work completed last year on Creative Aging Day 2015. Throughout that day perhaps 100 passersby added their touch to the work - that's community in action." ~ the heART Fit painters

A few days later, I was delighted to receive a phone-call to say that I had won the draw for the painting, which now hangs in my dining-room.

### Mary Lim, Marketing Coordinator, Rotary Centre for the Arts:

The first time I heard of Creative Aging was in the planning stages of the Second Annual *Creative Aging Day*. I was a new addition to the Rotary Centre for the Arts team, new to Kelowna, and new to the Arts, having spent all my working years in retail and corporate retail. Although the arts wasn't a

Top to bottom, left column

- Travelling grannies
- Calligrapher's Guild
- Ponderosa Spinners and Weavers
- Jewellery making

Top to bottom, right column

- A table dedicated to diversity
- The day is accessible to everyone



Top to bottom, left column

- Anita collects her painting
- And proudly displays it
- Learning
- Eldering
- Groovin' to the music

Top right: Caring clowns



prominent component in my life, I've always had an appreciation for them and they were always a part of my life in some capacity. When I heard the concept behind Creative Aging and learned the benefits of living a creative lifestyle, it made sense to me. It was like an Oprah 'Aha' moment, and I thought, why wait until I'm older to start living creatively? Why not start now?

The Rotary Centre for the Arts was bustling full of activities on the Second Annual Creative Aging Day. The building was set up like a tradeshow with dozens of tables occupied by artists and craftsmen eager to share their stories and crafts. Throughout the day we welcomed hundreds of locals – some came looking for new activities; others had never heard of Creative Aging and came to see what the event was all about, and a select few who had already heard of Creative Aging came in looking for inspiration. What stood out the most was the joy I saw in so many people's faces as they discovered new things and made new connections. It was a feel good day.

The Third Annual Creative Aging Day was set up similarly, but what I found different this year was that people were more open to the Creative Aging movement, and quite a few more knew what Creative Aging was and they came specifically to find new activities. Not only that, but this year we saw a lot more children and multi-generational families! It was fantastic to see the intergenerational sharing occurring at various tables and the number of people who are opening their eyes to aging creatively at a younger age.

Again, it was a feel good day, but this year it felt like we're starting to find our groove.

# THE BROWN BAG STUDIO

## Dee MacGibbon



Dee in her studio

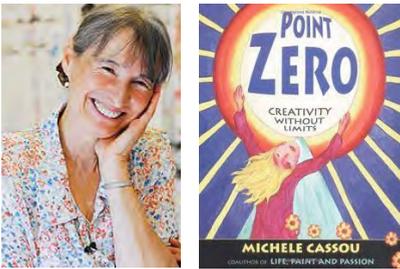


I have always loved engaging in activities that are creative and doing things that make life more joyful, more beautiful and more meaningful for myself and others. As much as I always wanted a life of creativity, social pressures as a young woman convinced me that a commitment to academia would serve me better in becoming an upwardly mobile adult woman. I set aside my dreams and my acceptance to Sheridan College School of Design and chose instead to attain a degree in economics from Queen's University. After several years of working for the federal government, I returned to school to get a degree in education from Simon Fraser University.

But, I never lost sight of a life for myself that was full of creativity and creative people. Is it any wonder that I am married to a man who is a skilled and creative gardener and our only child is a talented performing jazz musician?

As I reached retirement age, I decided it was time to live the life of creativity I had always imagined and I became a portrait painter working in soft pastels. I took up the challenge of creating acceptable, and sometimes excellent, likenesses of my subjects. People responded positively to my work. They liked the product. But something was missing for me. It felt as if I was striving and there was too much pressure to paint for approval and acceptance. I loved the beautiful pigments available in my box and always enjoyed including splashes of bright colour in my portraits. I painted skin tones that included blue, green and purple and added colourful scarves and hats whenever possible. But I wanted more. I wanted to play with form and colour and to freely express the images that were inside me and not those imposed from a photograph or an image in front of me. I made a few attempts to step outside the box by participating in groups that were advocating process over product and spontaneous free expression. However, I found in these groups that there were still too many opinions, judgments and unasked for feedback. And the group participants always ended up wanting to sell their paintings. Somehow, product always became more important than process.

And then I came across the work of Michele Cassou. She presented me with a way to truly paint for process and not product. At last I was discovering what I was so desperately looking for. I wanted to study with Michele and to attend one of her painting retreats in New Mexico but that was not possible. Instead, I set up my own painting space as she would in a workshop. I watched all her videos and read all her books. 'Point Zero' offers an excellent introduction to her work. Slowly I began to understand and better yet, experience, the absolute bliss of painting for process. This changed my life. I'm not going to explain in this article the work of Michele Cassou. If you are interested you can visit her website at <http://www.michelecassou.com/> where you can learn about her approach to



Top to bottom:

- Michele Cassou
- The book, Point Zero
- Peg painting in the studio
- painting by Doris
- Parker painting in the studio

painting and order her teaching materials.

From this, The Brown Bag Studio was born. I love to share time in my studio with almost anyone but my preference is for those people who consider themselves beginners, lacking in talent, but brimming with curiosity and wanting to have some fun. In order to focus on process and not product I use inexpensive brown paper which is taped to the walls and inexpensive student quality acrylics and tempera paint. This takes a lot of the pressure off. We use a variety of shapes and sizes of brushes. After introducing my painting companions to the available materials, I try to offer no input or feedback and we just paint. We don't analyze, criticize or comment on one another's work. The only things I insist on are completion and a respect for the work that has been done. I will often ask for permission to hang the completed painting in the studio for a few days and then the piece is rolled and stored for future reference.

What I am doing is unique because it is offered at no cost. I am retired and financially self sufficient. If people wish to paint in my studio on an ongoing basis, all I ask is a donation to cover the cost of materials. This can come in the form of cash, materials they wish to donate, or a gift certificate to Opus or Michaels where I can buy materials for the studio. Any money received above and beyond this are donated to the Canadian Mental Health Association.

If you wish to know more about The Brown Bag Studio, I suggest that you visit my website: [thebrownbagstudioblog.wordpress.com](http://thebrownbagstudioblog.wordpress.com) and if you have any questions you can direct them to me from the site. You can also click on the following link to read an interview that I did for Shelley Klammer's Expressive Arts website.

<http://www.expressiveartworkshops.com/how-to-start-your-own-art-program/art-programs-around-the-world/dee-macgibbon-canada/>

Professionals working in the areas of gerontology, mental illness and trauma healing are starting to realize the value of engaging individuals in creative activities. Presently, many adult day care facilities are contracting art therapists to offer creative programs to their clients. My sister works as a recreation programmer and facilitator for a regional facility of this kind in the Toronto area. Her clients all experience some level of progressive dementia. She is committed to engaging with them in an expressive arts program which offers them opportunities to paint for process and express themselves creatively. As a result she is discovering great joy, both in the participants and in herself, and finds the creative interaction to be rich and rewarding for everyone involved. I think this is wonderful in every way but we can't always depend on organizations and paid professionals to make life rich and meaningful. Individuals, with the available space and time can do as I am doing. You can offer many rich experiences to friends and acquaintances and even to strangers when you invite them into your studio to paint with you. Keep the focus on process, not product and I guarantee you will have a ton of fun and you will learn and grow, both as an artist and a human being. I challenge you to do this. If you want help getting started please visit my website or take a look at the valuable insights offered by Michele Cassou in her many teaching materials.

# TAKING THE TIME FOR ART IN THE OKANAGAN



## Suzanne Chavarie

While seated in the Rotary Centre for the Arts, Kelowna, enjoying a late lunch with a friend, I noticed a young man setting up outside the building. I watched and decided to inquire and find out what he was doing. He decided to let me take a couple of photos and I listened as he shared his story.

Then I saw his sign. A photo of his information is posted on his easel and his busk stop number for verification...

Not only has he created a very unique gallery of his works. His art and his story totally expand my concept of what art is and where to look for it. I invite you to look for him on the street or at his site. <http://www.kajpaget.com/blog/bicycle-trailer-easel-art-gallerystudio/>

I like the invitation he presents on his site:

“In response to the digital age of easy reproduction. It would be an honor to me if you used my images. I only sell the real thing. Art made by me, copies are free. The highest compliment you can give me as a artist/entertainer these days is to share and use and modify have fun with the digital images that are posted here by me.”

He’s making art about sharing without the traditional sense of ownership and selling we’ve come to expect. I visit my local art galleries regularly, but as I begin to really look, I’m opening to finding art in places I’m not expecting. - and I’m sure enjoying what I find.

I love sensual, beautiful gardens. Still when I read this quote, it made me see gardens in a new way.

“Gardening is the art that uses flowers and plants as paint, and the soil and sky as canvas.” -Elizabeth Murray

The Lake Country Garden Club hosts the annual Lake Country Garden Tour which supports and contributes to horticultural projects and education in the community of Lake Country. Their site states new members are always welcomed. Whether you are a seasoned gardener or you’re just getting started.

This past June, Irene Krause a resident of Lake Country, was part of the tour and her garden really impacted me. I like the idea of a garden being a personal living canvas. Irene’s garden is nestled on the hillside overlooking the shores of Lake Okanagan and beyond; it is bordered by lush evergreen bushes.

There is the feel of a “secret place” with an explosion of vibrant colours moving in the breeze and alive with carefully tended beds of spectacular

Just parked





arrays of flowers, vines and herbs.

When living and working in England Irene had enjoyed going for walks and visiting gardens, occasionally spending her lunch breaks visiting the Botanical Gardens, National Trust Gardens and weekends visiting her good friends John and Sue Panell in their garden. Their creative efforts inspired her. Their creation was a true masterpiece with over 500 to 600 flowers.

In 1999 when Irene retired and moved to Canada, she found time to explore new opportunities and knew gardening would be one of them. She imagined creating a sort of tribute to her time living in England. I liked her idea of recreating memories by gardening. Recalling happy reminiscences of conversations with her friends the Parnells, she used what she learned from them as her starting point. Now she carefully designs and makes plans to bring pleasure to herself and others. She likes planting things and watching for them to blossom - and if they don't, she simply plants something else. She enjoys the changes, keeps it interesting, and feels it's not a chore, but rather her work of love - her passion and her creative expression. Her canvas is a growing living space changing as the seasons permit with the special bonus that she gets to share her pride and joy with visitors.

Irene feels fortunate and believes that her gardens are one of the greatest gifts living in the Okanagan has given her. The community shares their gratitude to her for the gift of sharing her 'secret place'. As a thank you for being part of their tour, the Lake Country Garden Club gave her a set of quail designed by a gifted local artist, Roland Derk. The birds fit in just perfectly with the garden gallery theme.

Irene has lived in Germany, England and Canada. She has even created a garden in Mexico. Imagine enjoying the art of painting with the unique plants of these two very different communities she is planting herself into. What a perspective Irene gives to the art of gardening..

Left column, top to bottom:

- Art hangs anywhere
- About the art
- Irene in her garden
- A place alive with carefully tended beds

Middle column: Constantly changing

Right column: 'Arty' quail

All photos are by **Suzanne Chavarie** and her roving eye. Paying attention, savouring all she encounters and sharing her special finds with others is Suzanne's specialty. Filling with enthusiasm for every day and the art filled encounters she anticipates is her creative expression.

# MY WALK WITH LEONARDO DA VINCI?

## Karen Close



Observing without and within is the way of a pilgrim. This past summer I have been travelling with my husband on his most recent pilgrimage. He loves to set off at sunrise and walk the journey along the path trodden by the footsteps of history. I don't like to walk such long distances anymore, but I do think the camino, however one navigates it, makes the mind swell with history. It invites metaphor, and nudges one to examine their personal story and beliefs.

There are many routes. This August my husband and I started in Paris and followed Le Chemin de Camino through the Loire Valley of Northern France. Our destination for this day was Amboise, the town where Leonardo da Vinci spent the last three years of his life. I did not know the story, but I filled with wonder and reflection as I walked in the park with the spirit of Leonardo. The magic of a pilgrimage is you never know what each step will bring. You release to the path trusting what it will bring is right for you.

“The human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art.”

“Blinding ignorance does mislead us. O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes!”

Recollection of these words by the great genius set the course for my walk with his spirit. In June of 2016 The Château du Clos Lucé in Amboise celebrated the completion of its restoration and renovation work. For the last 60 years the process has been guided with careful scrutiny and purpose by The Saint Bris family. They have brought love to this site where da Vinci lived until his death at age 67, on May 2, 1519. As the 500 year anniversary of his decease nears, their realisation of an inspiring museum and park is an ideal location to consider creative ageing. Da Vinci left both words and projects to guide.

“Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it.”

“Wisdom is the daughter of experience.”

“Iron rusts from disuse; water loses its purity from stagnation ... even so does inaction sap the vigour of the mind.”

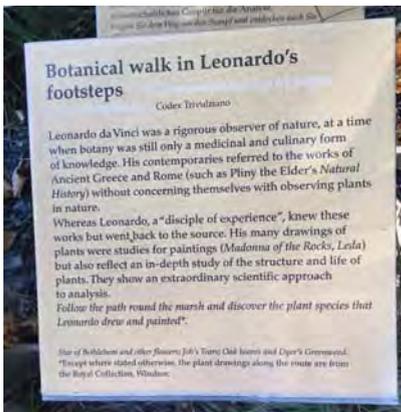
“Learning acquired in youth arrests the evil of old age; and if you understand that old age has wisdom for its food, you will so conduct yourself in youth that your old age will not lack for nourishment.”

“As a well spent day brings happy sleep, so a life well spent brings happy death.”

The intention in the development of the property was to present ‘a

Consider his prototype for a helicopter





Top: The Château du Clos Lucé  
Above: An invitation to discover

synthesis of knowledge which aims to allow the wider public to discover the universe of Leonardo da Vinci' - the genius and insatiable curiosity that was the man.

Similar to many leaders of Renaissance humanism, da Vinci did not see a divide between science and art. He viewed the two as intertwined disciplines rather than separate ones. Mona Lisa may be one of the world's best known paintings, but da Vinci was not a prolific painter. Fewer than two-dozen existing paintings are fully attributed to him. Instead, opening to his intuition of the universe absorbed him. He thought sight was humankind's most important sense,

and the eyes the most important organ. He stressed the importance of *saper vedere*, "knowing how to see." He believed in the accumulation of direct knowledge and facts through observation.

"There are three classes of people: those who see, those who see when they are shown, those who do not see."

The overview of da Vinci's last years as presented at The Château du Clos Lucé filled me with hope for what we can still learn from him.

"Knowledge of the past and of the places of the earth is the ornament and food of the mind of man."

I perceive sharing his ideas and inventions is the legacy he most cherished, not the products he created. Making records was his focus. Thousands of pages from his private journals with notes, drawings, observations and scientific theories have surfaced and provide a fuller measure of this true "Renaissance man." He filled dozens of notebooks with finely drawn illustrations and scientific observations. His ideas were mainly theoretical explanations, laid out in exacting detail, but like his paintings, often never brought to full completion. The main rooms in his home at Château du Clos Lucé are his workshops, his studio and his study. A particularly interesting presentation is made in his study where virtual figures present conversations between da Vinci and young mentees who came seeking to hear his advice and stories.

Locating da Vinci in Château du Clos Lucé is credited to a wise leader in the 16th century in France. King Francis I envisioned and understood the worth of human endeavour and the need to nurture it even as age advanced. Following a meeting in Bologna, in 1515, with Pope Leo X, France's new monarch offered da Vinci the title "Premier Painter and Engineer and Architect to the King". Leonardo accepted and departed his native Italy for France, never to return. He assumed this home in the Chateau de Cloux near the king's summer palace along the Loire River in Amboise.

Perhaps King Francis had more selfish motives than simply to reward Leonardo with an ideal space in which to self actualise, or sage, in his senior years. Perhaps the Saint Bris family has a variety of motives in their restoration of da Vinci's home. However, as I happily wandered through the



Top: Investigate  
Above: Her own logic

**Karen Close**, editor, and Robert MacDonald, publisher, *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*, believe strongly in the need to cultivate Creative Wellness for the betterment of ourselves and our communities. Five years ago they joined their talents to encourage others to tell their stories and share them freely on the internet through this Journal.

environment created, I felt deep gratitude for their compassion and a sense of peace that enlivened me. Although there are manicured portions, the most enchanting walks lead into the surrounding woods where replicas and explanations of da Vinci's inventions are thoughtfully displayed and invite glimpses into the master's mind.

"Human subtlety will never devise an invention more beautiful, more simple or more direct than does nature because in her inventions nothing is lacking, and nothing is superfluous."

"Although nature commences with reason and ends in experience it is necessary for us to do the opposite, that is to commence with experience and from this to proceed to investigate the reason. "

"To such an extent does nature delight and abound in variety that among her trees there is not one plant to be found which is exactly like another; and not only among the plants, but among the boughs, the leaves and the fruits, you will not find one which is exactly similar to another. "

"Nature is the source of all true knowledge. She has her own logic, her own laws, she has no effect without cause nor invention without necessity."

During my visit I felt totally absorbed, as though I was being guided by Leonardo. I imagined I was experiencing the peripatetic teaching that Aristotle practised with his students as they walked. The Greeks believed times of such deeper connection, such as I felt, occur at random, unpredictable moments that are tied into one's previous knowledge. The Greek's name for this coincidence of human action and a time that connects one to something deeper within themselves is *kairos*. Often these moments escape the attention of one who does not know, but for those who know, it is what reveals one's own knowledge to oneself. There is a shock of recognition and significance. Believed by the Greeks to be perhaps a gift of the gods, *kairos* brings a sense of profound gratitude. Believing in the sensation opens the moment.

I have felt moments of *kairos* before but usually connected to times when I have been painting or writing, times of deep involvement in creative expression. When I began to write this piece, I felt compelled to research and put Leonardo's words into the context of my own observations. I laughed when I read his advice, "It is better to imitate ancient than modern work."

Attraction to the ancient sages has strong appeal for me. I believe in adopting a personal responsibility towards creative spirit. So did Leonardo da Vinci. There is a need to restore individual self esteem and and its connection to creative expression. Who better to come on a walk with me than a man whose creative genius has been celebrated for centuries. I delight that he personally put less value on his creations than his need to explore his own creativity. When I took the time to look and research, I heard his directions and encouragement for those *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* and for me bringing my perspective on his story to the Journal.

"You can have no dominion greater or less than that over yourself."

"Life well spent is long." – Leonardo da Vinci

# HOW TO LISTEN SO IMAGES WILL SPEAK



## Lisa Lipsett

“The collective unconscious is a great wild region where we can get in touch with the sources of life.” ~ Carl Jung

In her seminal books *Art is a Way of Knowing* and *Art is a Spiritual Path*, Pat Allen shares a twenty-year process of image creation and image dialogue. She reveals how creative expression can open us to the unconscious. Dream Analyst Jeremy Taylor describes the unconscious as that which is “not-yet-speech ripe” and is akin to our own inner wilderness. Since we can’t control the unconscious and create what we want from it, dialoguing with images gives us an opening for connection and meaning that might otherwise be inaccessible. Symbolic language, like that in art, helps us enter this realm and dive into the subjective depth of things. We are offered a connection to “the source” when we engage in art making and dialogue with our images.

The source is embodied, connects all of us, is revealed in creative play and is the energy that first set the universe in motion. It is “that deepest part of you, that part that remembers everything with absolute clarity. It is the body intelligence that exists without words”, according to painter Aviva Gold. As the collective memory of the creation of the universe, the source is also home to the primordial imagery of myth, dreams and art. So we have access to a wellspring of creative energy and insight when we listen to our images and enter a reciprocal exchange. We blossom into art as a spiritual practice.

But if we can’t always just talk to our unconscious how does it communicate with us? Art making can help us develop a way of listening, characterized by an unclouding of preconceived notions about what images might be trying to say thus giving the unconscious authentic expression.

## Let Images Speak

It is detrimental to the life-enhancing message of an image to attempt to pin down a meaning or somehow “explain” what it is saying. When working with dream images visionary archetypal psychologist James Hillman cautions against our tendency to define the meaning of an image. Instead, he suggests, “we must animate our images thereby giving a life soul back to them” thus keeping images and their energies alive. In this way we animate both the soul of the dreamer and the soul of the dream images. Communing with the “other” is the goal, by making space to listen. Physicist David Bohm calls this communion “dialogue” a kind of reciprocal “flowing through”. To initiate the dialogue, we breathe in and breathe out in an exchange where we act more like witnesses to images rather than definers and labelers. Further, when we practice image dialogue with the images from our own inner wilderness, we learn skills necessary to also connect with the living world.



61. Photo: Yellow Rose

## How can we do this

In his work with expressive art therapy students, Shaun McNiff highlights the power of using different art modalities in a co-creative inquiry. Jung called this way of dialoguing “active imagination” a way of dialoguing and animating images with art. There is power in this approach because “images and processes of artistic creation are always at least one step ahead of the reflecting mind”. (Jung) Our understanding of what an image is saying is held back when we judge, analyze, label or otherwise pin down a creation, and its life force leaks out. The act of reflecting in an analyzing or explanatory way does not allow for the image to freely express itself.

## Create a cascading conversation

By writing a poem about some element of a painting we gain a new dimension of understanding of the message that the painting has to share.

By asking an image if it has anything to share then recording the response we give voice to colour and shape.

By painting dream images or exploring a colour or shape in a painting through painting a second image, we see more completely.

When we repeatedly open to our image stories we satisfy a deep longing for joy, reverence and awe. Art-making becomes a spiritual practice.

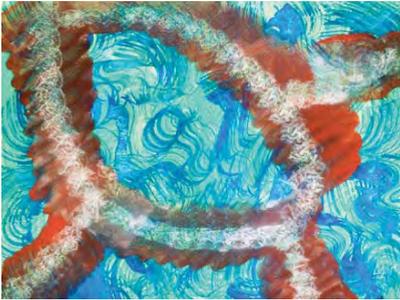
## Imagine a dream

The following is an account of how a dream of mine was the jumping off point for dialogue through painting and drawing that led to the creation of additional images and further exploration. I am swimming in a fast moving river and I’m heading downstream quite quickly. I’m on my back with my feet heading downstream and my hands sculling to provide direction and locomotion when needed. Up ahead on a rock I see a large brown bear. He is watching me with his all knowing bear eyes and I can not read his motive. He doesn’t look like he is about to retreat so I begin to quickly kick my feet and use my arms to swim back upstream and out of his reach. I chicken out.

The morning after the dream, I recorded it in my journal and decided that I wanted to go back and revisit the ending because I felt I had cut things short out of fear. I was sure that I hadn’t learned all there was to learn from the bear. I wondered what would happen if I closed my eyes and saw myself back in the river. I decided to take myself back into the river in my imagination, like in a meditation, so that I could learn more about the bear and if he had anything to share. I sat quietly, closed my eyes and saw myself floating my way towards him. When I approached the bear, he stayed still on his rock, he looked right at me, then to my surprise reached out, and gave me a beautiful yellow rose. I was so touched by his gesture, I held the rose in my hand and felt such love in my heart.

After the meditation, I decided to paint the energy of the rose. I wanted to know what I might learn and know about the rose, and I wanted to explore what this yellow rosininess was about. I set the intention to paint how the rose felt, much like the day I painted the way a vase of tulips felt instead of the way it looked (see Beauty Muse book <http://creativebynature.org/beauty-muse/>). So I closed my eyes to choose the colours and also to paint. I ended up with the following image.

The painting surprised me because it didn’t seem to have anything to do with a yellow rose. It was dark green and looked like an orange particle river was flying out of its banks, almost like there was a river of swimmers. Also the orange river seemed to be transforming into a blue-green network that was joining the swimmers.



62. Photo: Web 1

63. Photo: Web 2

64. Photo: Web 3

**Lisa Lipsett** is a Salt Spring, BC artist and founder of *Creative by Nature Art, Quiet Mind Art with Earth & Heart*

Her world burst open the day she painted the way a tulip feels instead of the way it looks. Lisa offers creative mentoring, creative nature connection programs in schools and personal transformation through art. Her passion is to free people from art anxiety so they may strengthen their creative nature for joy, connection and self-change. To learn more about Lisa <http://creativebynature.org/about/> Quiet Mind Art with Earth & Heart [www.creativebynature.org](http://www.creativebynature.org)

I continued to be curious so I whispered to the image “do you have anything to share?” The following poem emerged.

Yellow rose	I'll be your friend
Only knows	Until the end
What you are inside	I'll keep you safe and warm
Count your toes	So do not send
Let go your foes	And do not lend
And take me for a ride	My prickles can do no harm

The poem seemed to talk about being kept safe and secure as long as I did not send away the rose. Consistently over the many paintings that followed, every time I sat down to paint, a webby river network was revealed.

Artist and teacher, M.C. Richards states that artistic knowing, “is like an underground river that gives us life and mobility”. The more we can flow with our images, with our words, with creation, the freer and more harmoniously in tune we feel.

Further when we let images speak, we open ourselves to the mythical power of abstract art. James Wyly in his article about abstract art and the unconscious gets right to the nub of things when he says: “art’s liberation from the need to reproduce the objective world opens us to the myth making function of the psyche, then we may well begin to find in abstract art, which has popularly been seen as meaningless, the very existential meaning that is absent from our present culture... we could begin to give up our desperate and increasingly futile efforts to control our destinies through application of conscious intellect and trust the myth in which we live to reveal itself to us - if we watch for its appearances and enter into dialogue with its manifestations”. Fortunately making art gives the power to engage in this life long meaning making. By animating the soul of our images, we animate ourselves.

### Try this yourself.

Start simple. Create a painting (for ideas on how to start, see my book *Beauty Muse: Painting in communion with nature* <http://creativebynature.org/beauty-muse/>)

Once you have an image you are curious about, start with an “I noticed” sentence. What has caught your eye? What are you curious about? Write this down.

Then ask and record the answer to one “I wonder” question. For example:

I wonder who you are?

I wonder if you have anything to share?

I wonder where you came from?

I wonder how I can help you?

I wonder when you will appear again?

I wonder why you ...?

Try writing the question with one hand and the answer with the other.

After you have had a dialogue, start a new painting in response to something you are curious about.

This process can be never ending. Enjoy!

# OF THE MAKING OF ART AND THE ART OF MAKING SENSE OF IT

## Robert MacDonald



Me in Kensington Market in Toronto in the late 1960's. I was wearing practically every piece of clothing I owned, and it's obvious that I was not getting enough to eat.

Doris McCarthy's classes at Central Technical School in Toronto were famous for their vibrant conviviality and intense dedication.



I attended art school in Toronto in the late 1960s while still a teen, at the storied Central Technical School Art Department. I loved learning about art, about being an artist, about the tools of art-making, and about practicing and perfecting the techniques I was being taught. But I was really bad at being in school and barely made it through one year. I studied intensely, and often obsessively, with Alexander Ross, Charles Goldhammer, Doris McCarthy and Virginia Luz.

Most evenings and weekends, I buried myself in the public library and the art galleries, looking for a model or models for the work I wanted to make. I have included three works on these pages that provided direct inspiration for my subject choice: *Birth of Venus*, *Beach at Heist*, and *Enclosed Wheat Field with Rising Sun*. I studied them obsessively, examining every detail I could from the books that were available to me. I have shown and discussed each of them in more detail on the following pages.

I soon realized, though, that my technical skills were not at the level to emulate any of these works, and that I was going to have to find a way to achieve the same feeling without the technical mastery. I left it to posterity to determine whether my works were worthy of any further notice.

I did turn that period of learning into a productive but brief career as a painter of landscapes and nudes which sold in the gallery district on Gerrard Street, on the street in the Kensington market, and door to door in upscale neighbourhoods of Rosedale and Forest Hill. Somewhere on this page is a picture of me, buying vegetables after a hard day's slog. My landscapes were softly minimalist and my nudes were cheerfully rotund. They were meditations on identity and life, and they were a kind of pilgrimage through my inner passages. I sold more than a 100 of them in less than a year at an average price of \$100, big money back then. I used the money I saved to finance the first of many walking treks along the English coast trails, three weeks of walking, sleeping outside, and discovering the rich floral life of gardens, meadows and paths.

Upon my return in the late fall, I gave up on painting and set off on the beginnings of what would prove to be an long and winding career in the typographic arts, making pictures with words instead of paint.

Before I left for England, I made some notes towards a catalogue of my



Horizon 77, oil on wood panel, 1969. One of over 80 pieces painted in Colonsay, Saskatchewan.



Rotunda 23, oil on wood panel, 1969. One of over 70 pieces painted in Stratford and Ottawa, Ontario.

painting efforts, which I've burnished into a semblance of sense, and which follows below.

## The Idea of Art Making

The mysteries of existence - the paradoxical dualities of darkness and light, chaos and stillness, peace and violence, despair and contentment, belonging and exile, inclusion and alienation, the seen and the unseen - are hidden in the brush strokes of painters. We've all seen them, experienced them. The mysteries of our existence have a tendency to become lost in daily living, and art, and painting in particular, has the power to transcend the busy activity and invite us into a real but invisible realm. It allows us the opportunity to pause, to reflect, and to contemplate the world differently.

Painting is the outward expression of an internalized consciousness. Inherent in all paintings is a figural presence, a presence that ultimately brings completion to the image. And thereby imbuing a painting with memory and meaning, connecting the realms of visible and invisible - and allowing us as viewers to become a part of the picture. We are implied in the work of art as an additional presence, participating in the environment, idea and story envisaged by the artist. Without viewers actively engaging the aesthetics or objects of the art piece, the work would not exist as a complete idea.

When we stand before an art object, we also bring our selves to it. We bring our attitudes and our prejudices; we bring our pasts and those daily concerns that tend to trump the bigger mysteries of existence. Thus, we can often see an object but not see it at the same time. Paintings act as a mirror that reflects our position in nature and nature's position in relation to us and all of our internalized responses. Artists act as mediators between realms of the visible and the invisible; they communicate through visible information that which is certain but remains unseen.

In the same way that viewers bring themselves to the work, my activity as an artist was influenced by my own perspective. The subject of the works and the objects and shapes and colours within the works were artistic choices, yet they were simultaneously unconscious creative accidents. My brush was loaded equally with thought and paint; the outcome was, in many respects, one of compromise between my mood, direction, and intentions and the mood, direction, and intentions of the painting. I began with my own ideas of what to paint and the painting then posed challenges that I had to reconcile as I aimed to etch my ideas upon its surface.

My artworks were shaped by light, as light gives form to the formless. Yet it can also destroy form. Light is a measurement, a distance, and a constant. It is the means by which history can be interpreted and the vehicle by which time travels. Light is the symbolic presence that is necessary to connect viewers to the work and to help us glimpse the relationship between the known and the unknown, between us and the world, between earth and heaven. It is the possibility of becoming in every single moment.

## The Birth Of Venus

Completed in 1486, Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* has become one of the most heralded works of the Renaissance and a lasting symbol of feminine grace and beauty. Yet there's much more to this radiant work.

Christian inspiration was dominant in the art of the Middle Ages, so nudity was rarely portrayed. However, the emergence of humanism led to a renewed interest in the myths of ancient Rome, and with it a resurrection of nudes.

The piece's nudity takes on a more sensual tone when you know it was meant to hang over a marital bed. This locale and its daring depiction contributed to *The Birth of Venus* being hidden from public viewing for roughly 50 years.

On February 7, 1497, Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola spurred Christians in Florence to erect a seven-story pyre to burn art and other baubles like mirrors, jewelry, dice and art that were believed to promote sin. Some historical reports claim Botticelli was one of these followers and threw a few of his own works on the fire.

Beyond being a beloved example of Renaissance art, the painting has also become a marker by which other eras'



beauty norms are measured. Called the most beautiful woman in Florence as well as the most beautiful woman of the Renaissance, Simonetta Cattaneo de Vespucci was the muse who inspired several of Botticelli's works.

Though it was completed four years before its sister, *La Primavera* can be viewed as a sort of sequel to *The Birth of Venus*. While the latter depicts Venus's arrival in a world on the verge of blooming, the former shows the world in bloom around the now-clothed maternal figure.

It's said the pair of paintings were meant to communicate how "love triumphs over brutality."

Leaving out the many possible interpretations proposed by various experts, what is certain is the humanistic meaning of the work: Venus is the goodwill (the *Humanitas*), as she distinguishes the material from the spiritual values. The *Humanitas* promotes the ideal of a positive man, confident in his abilities, and sensitive to the needs of others.

Despite occasional invocations of "art for art's sake" and attempts to withdraw from life, art has always been significant, probing the same issues about the human condition that all forms of cultural life probe.

Artists are thinking and feeling human beings, and they think and feel intensely about the same important things that all intelligent and passionate humans do. Even when some artists claim that their work has no significance or reference or meaning, those claims are always significant, referential, and meaningful claims. What counts as a significant cultural claim, however, depends on what is going on in the broader intellectual and cultural framework. The world of art is not hermetically sealed - its themes can have an internal developmental logic, but those themes are almost never generated from within the world of art.

## The Modern Urge

Until the end of the nineteenth century, art was a vehicle of sensuousness, meaning, exploration and passion. Its goals were beauty and originality. The artist was a skilled master of his craft. Such masters were able to create

original representations with human significance and significant appeal. Combining skill and vision, artists were exalted beings capable of creating objects that in turn had an awesome power to exalt the senses, the intellects, the passions and the spirits of those who experience them.

The break with that tradition came when the first modernists of the late 1800s set themselves systematically to the project of isolating all the elements of art and eliminating them or flying in the face of them.

The causes of the break were many. The increasing naturalism of the nineteenth century led, for those who had not shaken off their religious heritage, to feeling desperately alone and without guidance in a vast, empty universe. The rise of philosophical theories of skepticism and irrationalism led many to distrust their cognitive faculties of perception and reason. The development of scientific theories of evolution and entropy brought with them pessimistic accounts of human nature and the destiny of the world. The spread of free markets caused many to see political developments as a series of deep disappointments. And the technological revolutions spurred by the combination of science and capitalism led many to project a future in which mankind would be dehumanized or destroyed by the very machines and emerging social structures that were supposed to improve their lot.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the nineteenth century intellectual

## Plage à Heist (Beach at Heist)

In the second half of the 1880s, after Georges Seurat and other Neo-Impressionists had exhibited their paintings at the Salon des XX in Brussels, several Belgian artists were converted to pointillism and the optical mixture of colours.

The painter George Lemman, (1865-1916), then scarcely twenty, was among these enthusiasts. For about a decade, gradually loosening Seurat's theories, he developed an original technique, applied more particularly to portraits and landscapes. After 1891, under the influence of his fellow countryman Henri Van de Velde, his paintings showed an "Art Nouveau" stylisation of which the 1891 Oil on wood *Beach at Heist* is a remarkable example.

The tight network of tiny round or oval dots arranged horizontally on the canvas enabled him to create distinct coloured zones clearly separated by a line of complementary colours. These shapes took on weird, anti-naturalist contours such as the huge bluish cloud which seems to invade the sky.



The only sign of human life in this nocturnal landscape is the abandoned boat, painted in purple strokes against a background dominated by yellow and orange. The exacerbation of the colours

and synthetic forms was part of the development of the Symbolist movement which opened a new era in the Franco-Belgian art community.



## Enclosed Wheat Field with Rising Sun

The Wheat Fields is a series of dozens of paintings by Vincent van Gogh, borne out of his religious studies and sermons, connection to nature, appreciation of manual labourers and desire to provide a means of offering comfort to others. The wheat field works demonstrate his progression as an artist

As a young man Vincent Van Gogh pursued what he saw as a religious calling, wanting to minister to working people. In 1876 he was assigned a post in Isleworth, England to teach Bible classes and occasionally preach in the Methodist church.

When he returned to the Netherlands he studied for the ministry and also for lay ministry or missionary work without finishing either field of study. With support from his father, Van Gogh went to Borinage in southern Belgium where he nursed and ministered to coal miners. There he obtained a six-month trial position for a small salary where he preached in an old



dance hall and established and taught Bible school. His self-imposed zeal and asceticism cost him the position.

After a nine-month period of withdrawal from society and family; he rejected the church establishment, yet found his personal vision of spirituality, "The best way to know God is to love many things. Love a friend, a wife, something - whatever you like - (and) you will be on the way to knowing more about Him; this is what I say to myself. But one must love with a lofty and serious intimate sympathy, with strength, with intelligence." By 1879, he made a shift in the direction of his life and found he could express his "love of God and man" through painting.

Drawn to Biblical parables, Van Gogh found wheat fields metaphors for humanity's cycles of life, as both celebration of growth and realization of the susceptibility

of nature's powerful forces

In May 1889 Van Gogh voluntarily entered the asylum of St. Paul near Saint-Rémy in Provence. There Van Gogh had access to an adjacent cell he used as his studio. As he ventured outside of the asylum walls, he painted the wheat fields, olive groves, and cypress trees of the surrounding countryside, which he saw as "characteristic of Provence." Over the course of the year, he painted about 150 canvases, including the one shown here.

In the detail shown above we can see dabs of colour representing flowers - some dabs have brush marks and some don't. This is an example of Van Gogh painting with paint rather than with the brush. Meaning that so much paint was on his brush that no bristle marks were impressed into the resulting strokes.

world's sense of disquiet had become a full-blown anxiety. The artists responded, exploring in their works the implications of a world in which reason, dignity, optimism, and beauty seemed to have disappeared. The new theme became: Art must be a quest for truth, however brutal, and not beauty.

Modernism demanded a recognition that the world was not beautiful, awesome and whole. The world was fractured, decaying, horrifying, depressing, empty, and ultimately unintelligible. That claim by itself is not uniquely modernist, though the number of artists who signed onto that claim is uniquely modernist. Some past artists had believed the world to be ugly and horrible - but they had used the traditional realistic forms of perspective and colour to say so.

**Artists and the art world should be at the outer limits, on the edge of discovery. They should be in space with the explorers, in the micro world with the sub-atomic engineers, in the computer labs, in the fields and forests with the chefs, foragers and horticulturalists.**

The innovation of the early modernists was to assert that form must match content. Art should not use the traditional realistic forms of perspective and colour because those forms presuppose an orderly, integrated, and knowable reality. Edvard Munch got there first with *The Scream* in 1893. If the truth is that reality is a horrifying, disintegrating swirl, then both form and content should express the feeling. If the truth is that reality is unintelligible, then art can teach this lesson by using realistic forms against the idea that we can distinguish objective reality from irrational, subjective dreams.

If we are uncomfortable with the idea that art or any discipline can tell us the truth about external, objective reality, then we will retreat from any sort of content and focus solely on art's uniqueness. And if we are concerned with what is unique in art, then each artistic medium is different.

For example, what distinguishes painting from literature? Literature tells stories - so painting should not pretend to be literature; instead it should focus on its own uniqueness. The truth about painting is that it is a two-dimensional surface with paint on it. So instead of telling stories, to find the truth of painting painters must deliberately eliminate whatever can be eliminated from painting and see what survives. Only then will we know the essence of painting.

Standard histories of art tell us that modernist art died around 1970, its themes and strategies exhausted - along with my brief modernist painting career just then as well.

## **The Postmodern Moment**

Postmodern art did not represent much of a break with modernism. Despite the variations that postmodernism represents, the postmodern art world has never challenged fundamentally the framework that modernism adopted at the end of the nineteenth century. Postmodernism has become an increasingly narrow set of variations upon a narrow modernist set of themes.

Postmodern art played out within a narrow range of assumptions, and we have become weary of the same old same-old, the minor variations. The tricks and gambits and gross-outs became mechanical and repetitive, and they no longer surprise, enliven or even gross us out.

Modernism and postmodernism in art came out of a very specific intellectual culture of the late nineteenth century, and have remained loyally stuck in those themes. But those are not the only themes open to artists, and much has happened since the end of the nineteenth century.

We would not know from the world of modern art that average life expectancy has doubled since Edvard Munch screamed. We would not know that diseases that routinely killed hundreds of thousands of newborns each year have been eliminated. Nor would we know anything about the rising standards of living, the spread of democratic liberalism, or the rising tides of culture and civility. Indeed, if we knew only the contemporary art world we would never get a glimmer of the excitement of evolutionary psychology,

the big bang of cosmology, the potential of genetic engineering, the thrill of robotics, the beauty of fractal mathematics - and the awesome fact that humans are the kind of being that can do all those paradigm-shattering things.

## The Next Next Thing

Paintings - like all art - tend to get and hold our attention through their abstract, or formal, energy. But even abstract paintings have representational qualities; the human brain cannot help but impart meaning to form.

There have been moments of dazzling balance between the representational and the abstract throughout history: Byzantine mosaics; pre-Columbian and American Indian textiles and ceramics; Stonehenge and Celtic stone monuments; Japanese screens; Mughal painting; Indian temple iconography; Islam calligraphy; and post-Impressionism.

Artists and the art world should be at the outer limits, on the edge of discovery. They should be in space with the explorers, in the micro world with the sub-atomic engineers, in the computer labs, in the fields and forests with the chefs, foragers and horticulturalists. The art world is now marginalized, in-bred, and conservative. It is being left behind, and for any self-respecting artist there should be nothing more demeaning - and consequential - than being left behind.

There are few more important cultural purposes than genuinely advancing art. We all intensely and personally know what art means to us. We surround ourselves with it. Art books and videos. Films at the theatre and via streaming video. Stereos at home and music on our phones. Novels at the beach and as bedtime reading. Trips to galleries and museums. Art on the walls of our living spaces. We are each creating the artistic world we want to be in. From the art in our individual lives to the art that is cultural and national symbols, from the \$10 poster to the \$10 million painting acquired by a public gallery - we all have a major investment in art.

The world is ready for bold new artistic moves. That can only come from those not content with spotting the latest trivial variation on current themes. It can come only from those whose idea of boldness is not waiting to see what can be done with waste products, and ennui, that has never been done before. The point is not that there are no negatives out there in the world for art to confront, or that art cannot be a means of criticism. There are negatives and art should never shrink from them.

But, please, enough with the uniform negativity and destructiveness of the art world. Enough with the smart-ass posing and posturing and petty incrementalism. When has art in the twentieth-first century said anything encouraging about human relations, about mankind's potential for courage, about the sheer positive passion of being in the world?

Pictorial communication - signs, symbols, images and colours on a flat surface - is one of the oldest and richest of human inventions, like writing or music. It started on rocks and the surfaces of clay pots and in the woven

**Enough with the uniform negativity and destructiveness of the art world. Enough with the smart-ass posing and posturing and petty incrementalism. When has art in the twentieth-first century said anything encouraging about human relations, about mankind's potential for courage, about the sheer positive passion of being in the world?**



threads of textiles, then moved to walls, wood panels, copper and canvas. It now includes plasma screens and graphic novels, and will soon include the building blocks of nature and the universe. Once again, artists will be gods.

Artists create a world in their work, and they contribute to the creation of our cultural world, our sense of ourselves, our sense of the universe. The point is not to return to the 1800's or to turn art to making pretty postcards. The point is about being a human being who looks at the universe afresh. The world of postmodern art is a run-down hall of mirrors reflecting tiredly some innovations introduced a century ago. It is time to move on.

### **And, Inevitably, Back to Me**

Even so, paint on a portable surface remains one of the most efficient and intimate means of self-expression, and we all have a need of that at different points in our life-cycles. Five decades after I abandoned painting to chase different objectives, I have come back full circle to my pursuit of wisdom through colour and form and shape, and addressing the blank surface. With less urgency, for sure, but nevertheless with the same vigour for ideation, for storytelling and for imaging. I'm enjoying every moment of it.

I have included a couple of recent pieces which show the road I'm travelling.

# SAGE-ING WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT, GRACE & GRATITUDE

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Sage-ing with Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude exists to honour the transformational power of creativity.

It is a quarterly journal intended as an initiative for collaboration and sharing. It presents the opportunity for the free exchange of wisdom gleaned from creative engagement. We invite all ages to contribute their discoveries.

Sage-ing is about seeking - satisfying inner gnawing and transforming it to knowing and action. Aging can be alchemy when one allows the realisation that to *Know Thyself* and contribute that knowing to our culture is indeed one of life's highest purposes. That knowing brings the gratitude, grace and integrity that a life deserves. The creative journey into self is a strong aid to health and well-being for the individual and to our culture.

This journal exists for all those serious in exploring their creativity, in a chosen expression. It is a forum for publication and exposure to other artists, both novice and established. This journal is an easel for any form of artistry undertaken out of personal intuition and imagination.