

THE JOURNAL OF Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

with Creative Spirit, Grace & Gratitude



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KNOW YOURSELF. BE YOURSELF.  
LOVE YOURSELF. SHARE YOURSELF.  
ONLINE AT [www.sageing.ca](http://www.sageing.ca)

## FROM THE EDITORS

***"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."* – Andy Warhol**

We believe that honest creativity can create change. Creativity has a unique way of connecting diverse perspectives and helping us discover our commonality. When a creator's perspective can connect with another's emotions there is resonance, a reverberation that will create change. Our theme for this issue was a recognition that 2025 has been disturbing, which for many invited their creative spirit to respond and call to our commonality. Our issue begins with a reach-out from *Sage-ing's* founding editor reflecting on this process within herself and her faith in the power of creative spirit: "creativity isn't about making art; it's about being an independent thinker and bringing light. You don't need tremendous talent; you just need the courage to question conventional practice and trust your creative nature." Nearly two decades after retirement Elaine Hatch shares her delight of FINDING MY WAY INTO ME through creative ventures. In DRIVING AND HIKING TO DE-STRESS IN NATURE Joe Godard shares "My wife Joy and I love the Porsche with the top down and a new road" as his creative outlet. How each finds creative stimulation can be truly unique and bring benefits to others, as Suzanne Chavarie describes in EMBRACING CHANGE. Like many Canadians, poet Penn Kemp has been once again moved to activism by recent political events. ART IN ACTION: IN RESPONSE presents an important chronology of her activism through poetry. Believing in the need to understand better the role of the Divine Feminine in these current times, Susan LeBlanc, in FEEL THE HEART-BEAT OF EXPRESSION WITHIN YOU,

explains how to access it through the technique of cell pour painting. "A covenant is a promise we make with and to ourselves, about the kind of person we want to be, the kind of life we mean to have, together with other people and with all other living things," urges Robert MacDonald in THE CREATIVE IMPULSE: Finding Inspiration in Elderhood. In FROM THE DARKNESS, LIGHT UP KELOWNA... Laura David presents a community art project that encourages sharing art in communal spaces. WHEN BALLET SPEAKS presents Karen Close's delight in how the ballet *Vividus: Full of life* speaks to the triumph of all-powerful life force. Supporting further the power of creative expression in EXPRESSING MORE PERSONALLY ... OR POLITICALLY Laura David elaborates, "I've learned since that art is therapeutic in that it is a way to deal with times of stress and uncertainty in a healthy way... in whatever form works for a particular person and situation."

"What we plant in the soil of contemplation, we shall reap in the harvest of action." Meister Eckhart  
Often when we think of September we think of harvest time and cultivation, and the connection between planting, nurturing and, finally, reaping. To cultivate creativity, we can think of it in the same way: planting it and nurturing it to cultivate it. To do so, we are often encouraged to embrace play, take risks and be open to finding inspiration in unexpected places. **In our next issue we ask, how do you, whether in writing, painting or other arts, cultivate the creativity in your work?**

– Karen Close, Laura David and Johanna Beyers

## HOW TO SUBMIT

The theme to consider for our next issue will be in the FROM THE EDITORS in each issue. Your story is to be original, related to creativity in any of its many forms, as a path to gaining self awareness and wisdom, and/or the act of harvesting your life's wisdom as a legacy for future generations.

Please attach it as a word document (.doc) – not a PDF - to enable editing, using calibri font, 14 pt, 1.5 spacing. 500 – 1500 word maximum (use word count).

Please attach 3-4 photos, separately, including: Your headshot, 2-3 photos related to your article. All photos should be numbered, given a caption, and attached in high resolution jpg. format. 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 a brief bio note, written in the third person (one or two short paragraphs of up to 200 words). Your bio will be placed at the end of your article and is intended 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. Please include your preferred contact information, including email, website, blog address – whatever you want included in the publication. In your cover email, please share how you found your way to submitting to Sage-ing. Please email your article and photographs to Karen Close at [karensageing@gmail.com](mailto:karensageing@gmail.com)

Quarterly issues of The Journal go online around a solstice or equinox: March, June, September, and December. We need to receive your intention of submitting an article by the first day of the preceding month or earlier. **Your complete submission is required by the first day of the month preceding publication.**

## WHO WE ARE

### Karen Close, Editor,

taught English and Visual Arts for 30 years. Retirement in 1995 gave her the opportunity to meet vibrant senior Canadian artists and to hear their stories.



Indigenous cultures teach us, "All Elders have medicine—physical, emotional, musical, story. Let's give our unique medicine to the world." In 2011, believing in the medicine inherent in creative expression, Karen began editing the free online arts and aging journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. She is the author of two books. *Unfinished Women: Seeds From My Friendship With Reva Brooks* and *The Spirit of Kelowna: A Celebration of Art and Community* profiles a community art project in Kelowna, BC. In January, 2015 Woodlake Publishing released *Creative Aging: Stories from the Pages of the Journal Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude*. Karen is the recipient of the 2016 City of Kelowna Honour In The Arts award.



**Johanna Beyers, Copy Editor,** is a poet and mixed media artist. She began her career as a marine paleontologist, and holds a PhD in environmental policy

and a Master's of Social Work. She is a certified sandplay therapist. Johanna is the author of *Sandbar Islands* (The Caitlin Press, 1988) and *Wearing my Feathered Hat* (Wind Oak & Dove, 2013). Her work has been published in *The Capilano Review*, *Sage-ing*, *Room of One's Own*, *CV2*, *Waves*, and elsewhere. She has been copy-editor for *Sage-ing* since 2018.

### Laura David (Foster), Assistant Editor,

Artist Laura David (Foster), MPS, CCC, formerly a registered art therapist and clinical counsellor (with Foster Art and Wellness in Edmonton/Kelowna) is now retired and enjoying life as a grandmother. She has worked therapeutically with individuals and groups in various organizations, but now has chosen to return to her first love: to focus on her own work as an artist. She has developed a passion for the healing power of art that stems from her lived experience of mental health issues, recovery, spirituality, and creating and teaching art. She pursued this passion by completing a Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree at St. Stephen's College with an Art Therapy specialization. Laura agrees, "Feeling is the power that drives art" (1991, David Milne).



**Robert MacDonald, Designer and Publisher,** has lived by his wits, some hard work, and a good lashing of luck. Almost completely

unschooled, he has, over several decades, invented identities as graphic artist, typographer, printer, community activist, publisher, information architect, program director, programmer, and designer. He hasn't finished with inventions. Having spent most of his life thoroughly urbanized (Toronto, New York, San Francisco, Vancouver) he is now nestled into the grasslands and orchards of the Okanagan valley. He finds profound solace in the virgin wilderness upland from his habits. His works have appeared in the journals *Kosmos*, *Image*, *Sage-ing*, and more, and he has chapbooks: *Dead Drop* and *Headwinds*, with more anticipated. He is transcribing several decades of writings from notebook to manuscript, and is otherwise biding his time.

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Cover image: *Cell pour painting 1*. by Susan Leblanc

**Please note:** not all browsers can use the hyperlinks on our PDF pages. If you encounter that issue, we suggest you copy the web and email links, and paste them into your applications.

# MAKING FRIENDS WITH YOUR OWN MIND

## Be Your Own Kind of Beautiful

**Karen Close**

**Anthroposophy has a theory of seven-year cycles that proposes human development unfolds in distinct stages.**

The *Sage-ing Journal* is my response to the growing need to share the 'knowing' my life experiences seemed to awaken in me and others. The ancient Greek meaning of becoming a sage, an individual distinguished for wisdom and sound judgment, seems a worthy goal for our times. We need wisdom, not the populism of today.

I was fortunate to be able to retire from a teaching career at age 49 just as I was entering what I felt would be an important transition and time to take stock. I loved my teaching career, my marriage and my family, but I also felt a deep internal gnawing – a need to reflect and explore me and my ideas. Adventures beckoned and I eagerly responded. Early in my quest I was attracted to Rudolf Steiner and his belief in spiritual perception independent of the senses – 'a knowing'. He called this philosophy, centred on "knowledge produced by the higher self in human kind", anthroposophy. As I delved into his ideas and educational insights, I found reinforcement for the personal philosophies that had informed my teaching and now seemed a direction for moving forward with my life.

Anthroposophy has a theory of seven-year cycles that proposes human development unfolds in distinct stages, each lasting approximately seven years, with each cycle influencing various aspects of a person's physical, emotional and spiritual development. In these seven-year cycles, age 54 marks a period of significant spiritual and personal growth – a time to examine and build on one's foundation. I was eager to be prepared.

Steiner's anthroposophy focuses on human wisdom, or knowledge of the human being. As a teacher of English and the Visual Arts I had always

believed that the most important path for engaging my students was by stimulating them to learn about themselves and each other through the arts and literature. As we studied art history and literature I focused on encouraging creative expression. I believed students who were open to themselves, to each other and to me would be more confident and more willing to learn 'the hows' of the curriculum and how those pertained to them. In anthroposophy the 54-60-year age range is seen as a time for individuals to begin to integrate their understanding of the world, their past experiences and their unique gifts into a more unified sense of self. This evolution includes a deeper

My first painting, done while attending a course on anthroposophy





Seeking

understanding of their own needs, how best to contribute to society, and evolving a greater sense of purpose. I became committed to my belief that allowing authentic creative expression to blossom is our guide to wisdom and self-fulfilment. As I became clearer about my personal purpose, I created the journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* in the fall of 2011.

My early years of retirement allowed me to gain vision as I evolved myself. Visiting the arts community of San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, I became deeply involved with two senior Canadian artists, Leonard and Reva Brooks, who had helped develop their community into becoming a destination for those pursuing creative interests, particu-

larly retirees. In 2002, I published *Unfinished Women, Seeds from My Friendship With Reva Brooks*.

The more I came to value my creative spirit, the more imaginative I became in my paintings. As I painted *Seeking*, I played with media guided by my intuition and I became fascinated by what appeared. I saw so much and was highly stimulated.

“Reason can answer questions, but imagination has to ask them.” – Ralph Gerard (American neurophysiologist)

Without imagination, we stay stuck in the realm of the literal. Our imagination comes from the soul – the unconscious – and, as we connect with divinity, purpose and others, we become multidimensional, more accepting, better able to experience more love, create more beauty, manifest more results, change our conditions, rewrite the past.

In 2008, through our local arts centre I developed and taught a program I called heART Fit. My goal was to create an intergenerational, all-gender inclusive community, gathered from all walks of life, where we could share creative philosophy and spread appreciation for how a regular, intuitive creative practice in community opens us to ourselves and each other, improves engagement, and focusing self-confidence and well-being equally for all ages. Creating in community builds leadership by encouraging individuals to more fully appreciate and learn from each other’s strengths, regardless of age or ability, and also to move forward with common purpose through collaboration. Steiner’s theories of anthroposophy, first expressed in 1912, taught that engaging in a creative practice is essentially transformative; the arts should form a path of constant inquiry and insight into the self, the other and the world, encouraging unity and empathy as a cornerstone for building a culture. Authentic creative expression is an intuitive practice, which is an expression of the heart rather than learned ideas. It is a practice that develops healthy, resilient, empathetic individuals co-operating to contribute to their culture’s well being. A hundred years after their introduction I wanted to nurture Steiner’s theories.

The journal *Sage-ing With Creative Spirit, Grace and Gratitude* was born

**Engaging in a creative practice is essentially transformative; the arts should form a path of constant inquiry and insight into the self, the other and the world,**

**The Greeks believed perception of aesthetic balance within a work contributes to a sense of inner balance within the viewer. We need to foster 'Creative Wellness', an understanding of creativity as a process for human growth.**

from what heART Fit taught me. I believed it was time to reach into a larger classroom with an online presence on the world-wide web. I envisioned a community of sharing, connecting those also eager to share their creative discoveries and realizations. In addition, I have always been intrigued by the art of ancient Greece, which believed in the importance of developing a sense of aesthetic balance, an innate, intuitive sense of the harmonious arrangement and equilibrium of visual elements within an artwork or composition. The Greeks believed perception of aesthetic balance within a work contributes to a sense of inner balance within the viewer. Particularly in the last hundred years the Greek sense of fostering aesthetic appreciation and a sense of well-being through art appreciation has been lost. Rather, art is appreciated in the context of expertise and consumerism with less regard for it as an expression of humanism and a way of thinking and living that prioritizes human well-being and values.

After my years in San Miguel de Allende I began focusing more on my own creative urges. I could hear the echo of Reve Brook's words, "My photographs are my children. I must nurture them and let them speak their truths. I don't want to sell them. You don't sell your children." Unable to have children, she wanted to 'mother' her photographs, communicate with them and keep them near her. "The end of art is peace", she said. Feminine energy is often associated with creativity and innovation because it is linked to qualities like nurturing, sensitivity and intuition. In Hinduism, the universal creative force, Yoni, is feminine, with inspiration being the life force of creation. Taoism, through its concept of yin, also represents the creative force of the female half of yin and yang. In Indigenous cultures the moon's nocturnal presence and its ability to influence the tides are linked to the mystical and intuitive aspects of female energy. When I paint I feel more strongly in touch with my feminine energy. I have taught myself to watch my paintings evolve, to respond rather than direct them. For both males and females, I believe feminine energy should be balanced with masculine energy for a more harmonious and fulfilling life. Compassion, intuition and creativity are seen as the 'being' mode in contrast to the 'doing' mode of masculine energy.

In our culture, masculine energy – since it's often about progress – tends to be valued more than feminine energy. For both males and females this can create a feeling of being unwhole, off-balance and longing for something more – something rejuvenating, something resourceful. I believe feminine energy is the force of transformation and enhancement of our strengths needed in these difficult times. We need to foster 'Creative Wellness', an understanding of creativity as a process for human growth. Both voices from art history and emerging medical discoveries have come together to give important insight for encouraging 'Creative Wellness'. Contemporary culture has placed too much value on creativity and the arts as a product to be marketed. At my core I am a teacher encouraging creative expression for personal growth. Like John Steinbeck, "I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great



Sharing Heart Expressions  
through

PLAY

Purposeful Learning About Yourself

**Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit. Creativity isn't about making art; it's about being an independent thinker and bringing light.**

artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit." I do not presume greatness, but, like all aspiring artists, I keep trying. Influenced by voices in the *Journal*, and working in collaboration with a dear friend who is a retired nurse, we are currently evolving a program to encourage others to grow into their strengths through creative expression. We call our program 'sHe Warriors'.

Feminine energy is a force of transformation because it encourages one to move intuitively with the flow of life, attuning to our bodies and internal processes.

*"Two people have been living in you all your life. One is the ego, garrulous, demanding, hysterical, calculating; the other is the hidden spiritual being, whose still voice of wisdom you have only rarely heard or attended to."* – Sogyal Rinpoche (1947-2019), Tibetan Dzogchen lama

Nineteenth-century transcendentalists urged artists to create what resonated with their souls. Art history is filled with those who have, through the millennia, pioneered what we are calling 'sHe WARRIORS'. Now in a world of increasing uncertainty, creativity is more important than ever. Art is alchemy. It transmutes pain into beauty. When we create art, we open a tiny portal to the soul that brings light. Imagine the phases of the moon. Perhaps you saw the first full moon of spring 2025, referred to as the pink moon announcing the rebirth of spring. Moon energy, in a spiritual context, is often viewed as a potent and powerful force that influences emotions, intuition and spiritual growth. It's believed that the moon's cycles, particularly the full moon, can amplify our energy and connect us with our deeper selves and feelings. At its core, creativity isn't about making art; it's about being an independent thinker and bringing light. You don't need tremendous talent; you just need the courage to question conventional practice and trust your creative nature. Now is the time to share your vision with the world. In my heart I believe that is the purpose of the world-wide web. Share your voice on [www.sageing.ca](http://www.sageing.ca). Help us become a voice of vision on the Internet.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In Fact, it's the only thing that ever has."* – Margaret Mead

# FINDING MY WAY INTO ME

## Elaine Hatch



I began my art adventure 17 years ago after retiring as an elementary school teacher. I hadn't planned on becoming an artist, but one day my daughter asked if I'd like to accompany her and my granddaughter to a "family day" at the Kelowna Art Gallery. Apparently, an informal art lesson aimed at young children would be taught, and my daughter felt I might enjoy watching my three-year-old granddaughter create something. I said no. My daughter, accustomed to my unique charm, bribed me with the possibility of a post-art-class coffee and a doughnut. Well, that was the incentive I needed. I went, enjoyed my granddaughter and learned an art technique. The following week my daughter repeated the request, and I accepted under the same conditions. The third week, as I began to notice my pants fitting tighter, my granddaughter learned about impasto in class. My interest peaked. I wanted to participate! And from then on, I was hooked. I remember skipping directly to Opus after the class to ask where I could buy antipasto. Luckily the response from the employees was not only laughter, but encouragement.

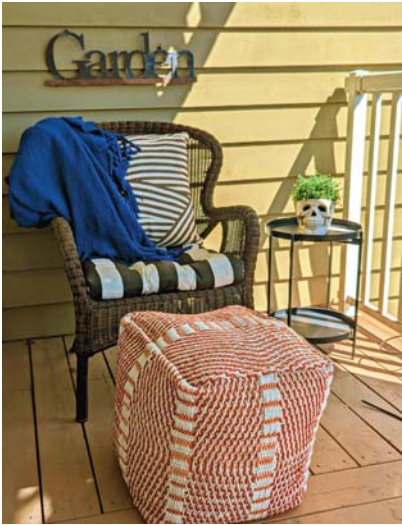
Nearly two decades later, I am still experimenting with mediums and techniques. I'm inspired by vibrant, sometimes clashing colours, the texture of items like peeling paint, old moss and torn bits of paper, and the imperfec-

*Hey, Hey the Gang's All Here.*



tions that arise through the process of decay and the passage of time. Like me, my subjects have been described as "unique." They are aged, gnarled and wrinkly but comfortable in their own skin. Old houses with broken windows and chipped paint, crooked trees bereft of their leaves, mishmashes of found items – these subjects inspire me because I can relate to them. My art is, unabashedly, a reflection of the human I have become.

When weather permits, I like to start my mornings sitting on my porch, the occasional mimosa in hand. From there I get to observe trees, pinecones, distant mountains and, if I'm lucky, a nest or two. Recently, that routine prompted me to create a series of nests and trees as a nod to the matriarchs around us. I incorporated elaborate textures – eight, nine, ten or more layers of medium – and thoroughly enjoyed the freedom that comes



Top left: *Morning seat.*

Top right: *Dirty Laundry, incorporating Tyvek clothes.*

Above: Raw materials



I like to vary my approach, sometimes working on abstract pieces, other times aiming for representational output. This experimentation can result in a “Wow” result or a “What the...” result, both equally unexpected. For instance, I recently discovered Tyvek, a building material used for housewrap, and it gave me a true “Eureka!” moment. I learned that not only could I paint on it, but that it is also puncture-, water- and UV-resistant, so I could use it to create an interactive piece. Revolutionary! In the end, nearly all outcomes make for excellent conversation starters. Conversation leads to connection and, for me, that is the true purpose of art.

**Elaine Hatch** has been an artist for nearly 15 years. Early on, she learned that drawing was not her forté, but it didn't take long for her to find mixed media, collage and other creative approaches to artistic expression. Since then, Elaine has been on a near-constant lookout for interesting objects to glue onto a canvas. To watch Elaine's creative process, watch the video on her website. Enjoy. It's a delightful watch. Make sure your sound is on!

In the past, Elaine travelled to Russia, Greece, China and other countries for inspiration and possibilities. Nowadays, you're more likely to find her on a local nature walk, in a secondhand bookstore, or wandering around a hardware store, earnestly searching for oddities.

Elaine's studio reflects her discoveries: wood bark, shiny rocks, lace from an old wedding dress, rust from a watering can... all of these items have found a home on past canvases. The search for new potentials is ongoing.

from being unapologetic. Cheers to Mother Nature!

A new-ish inspiration is old architecture, specifically building façades and doors. What's behind those closed entryways? Family heirlooms? Dusty ornaments and discarded wrapping paper? Dark wine and aged spellbooks? I use found items generously, including bits of lace, nuts and bolts, old recipes ... the tools available to me for visual storytelling are, if not endless, vast. I find that possibility always motivates.

# DRIVING AND HIKING TO DE-STRESS IN NATURE

## Joe Godard



Finding creative ways to deal with these uncertain times is definitely a challenge, and we can take different artistic endeavours, such as painting or poetry, but in the end whatever we choose is creative and it achieves the same goal. Driving in nature is the endeavour I choose.

In a submission to Porsche Monthly, I wrote, “My wife Joy and I love the Porsche with the top down and a new road. We have been on many drives over the last few years, seeing many of the beautiful sights here on Vancouver Island. One of my favourite drives in the last 12 months was to Myra falls, at the head of Buttle Lake.” Driving in our Porsche serves to get us away from all the ruminating thoughts and the uncertainty of the times in perhaps a unique way that suits our lifestyle.

When Joy and I have had our coffee in the morning and we both kinda feel that today would be a good day for a drive, we just know it is time to “get outta Dodge” Any drive in the convertible is a good drive, but to scratch the itch, we need a much longer drive. We like to get into a scenic drive right away but sometimes you have to take the time to get there first. One particular day we decided to do one of our favourite things. Waterfall hunting! We hadn’t been to Myra falls yet and had heard great things about it, so off we went. We packed lunch, drinks and walking shoes. The drive to Strathcona Park on Vancouver Island took about 2 hours of highway driving.

It is not my favourite kind of drive but it is a beautiful highway. Being on any highway can be a good time to listen to some favourite music or podcasts and can set the mood for what’s to come. The sun is shining and the top is down. I can feel my mind going up and out to the world around me. This connection is what I am looking for and I am never disappointed. If we were on the 99 in downtown Vancouver (West Georgia Street), we would not have the same feeling. When we turn off the main highway at Campbell River, the scenery turns to tall fir and cedar for about 30 minutes. I have driven this road before and I know it is winding and changes elevation quickly. The Porsche has been waiting for this as much as I have and eagerly accepts

*Porsche in Nature*





*Porsche in Nature*

**“Want to get a prescription for nature access to Canada? Here’s how it works...”  
– CBC News**

the direction it is given. Speed is not what is needed here. A heightened sense of your surroundings is. This begins the connection to the natural beauty, sights, sounds and smells of one of Canada’s most beautiful drives.

As I noted in the article in *Porsche Monthly*, “...the scenery at the start of the lake is enough to make you feel like you are very small compared to the grandeur of the mountains. The fresh lake air mixed with the forested mountains is enough to occupy your mind, unless you are trying to push the pavement behind you. Then your brain tries to stress your reflexes and inhale the stunning scenery at the same time. It will clear your head and fill it simultaneously.”

The article was submitted originally to the monthly periodical for Porsche and printed in March 2025. The theme: “Driving as a form of connection with nature, adventure, and journeys of exploration; cars as extensions of the owner’s personality, reflecting their tastes, and lifestyle; psychological connection; neural links, mood, stress relief and extension of home.”

Recently, having written this article, my wife Joy and I have been noticing other articles about this connection with nature. One is about “a Prescription for Nature” (PaRx, [parkprescriptions.ca](http://parkprescriptions.ca)). It explains how people in B.C. can be prescribed experiences in nature, as evidence is showing that time in nature is a “simple, fun and effective” form of health care and therapy. Another piece that drew our attention was “Want to get a prescription for nature access to Canada? Here’s how it works...” (CBC News, January 4, 2025). For us, these articles validate our weekend adventures further.

**Joe Godard** was delighted that his submission was published in the *Porsche Monthly* and also happy to share portions it here, in *Sage-ing*. He and Joy continue enjoying nature on the wonderful Vancouver Island and driving to such places as Tofino, a beach town on the east coast of the island, other falls, and Cathedral Grove and Miracle Beach, which are along the way. They enjoy photographing the beautiful sites at different times of day and in different seasons of the year.

Joe, born and raised on Vancouver Island, has lived there throughout his life. He has worked as a consultant for a good part of this time with small and large companies, helping them to find solutions, reduce costs of operations and risk of security threats, as well as their environmental footprint. When Joe is not out driving, you’ll find him barbecuing and otherwise entertaining family and friends. He and Joy have been married for over 30 years and have two adult children who live in Vancouver.

# EMBRACING CHANGE

## Suzanne Chavarie



Renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung believed that how you wear your hair symbolizes ideas and thoughts. Jung viewed symbols as ways of understanding and expressing the unconscious. Hairstyles can be interpreted as symbolic languages that communicate a person's identity, mood or connection to certain archetypal figures. He explained choosing a hairstyle, and how one cares for one's hair, is a way of expressing oneself and participating in the process of self-discovery.

"Your hair is a statement you make without saying a word" – Unknown  
Hairstyles can serve as a powerful medium for artistic expression and statement, reflecting personal identity, cultural heritage and even political commentary. For me personally, my hairstyle feels as if it has expressed my individuality and reflected my personal journey. For many decades, I wore a braid down my backside to my waist. I felt it expressed who I was as a woman when family, friends and society had many styles. But I have stayed true to my braid – never changing, just a good trim every few years.

For the 2021 member's exhibition at the Kelowna Public Art Gallery my painting titled *In the Moment* was a response to Jim Carey's statement: "Your need for acceptance can make you invisible in this world. Risk being seen in all your glory." It is an abstract acrylic that I painted of my back side and braid. Over the years my braid naturally became part of my trademark.

When a colleague at the elementary school I work at asked if I would be interested in joining her in having our ponytails cut as a donation to "Wigs for Kids" and together raise awareness and funds for the B.C. Cancer Foundation I said, Of course. Our goal was to raise \$1000. So to make it fun

and interesting we hosted a school-wide assembly and an online fundraiser. The assembly was called Ponytails for Wigs for Kids.

On a Wednesday in April over 400 children, staff and visitors assembled in our school gym. The two students who were chosen to cut my hair used a pair of school scissors. Snip, snip, scrunch, snip is what I heard. In a flash my ponytails were cut and the children cheered and clapped. I felt a big smile.

I had agreed to split 'my style' open and change. For over five decades I had chosen to wear my hair in a braid, a ponytail or a bun most days. And with a clip of some school shears I found a willingness to split this style open and change what had been me. It was for a

Suzanne with husband at the opening of the Kelowna Art Gallery exhibition *Undressed* (2021)





good cause, a fundraiser, a donation of hair, with my school community, family and friends rooting for me. In essence changing your hairstyle can be seen as a call to action for personal transformation and willingness to embrace new possibilities.

I googled AI and found that the total market size of hair care in Canada was estimated at \$2.03 billion in 2021. The analyst predicted the market will reach \$1.37 billion in 2025, growing at an annual rate of 2.26%. Yes, hairstyle can be considered a form of art. Hairdressing and hair styles involve creative expression, sculpting and arranging hair to create unique designs, just like other art forms, e.g. painting and sculpture.

Through conversation the opportunity presented itself and I said yes. I must admit I was a little nervous having a Kindergarten and Grade 3 student cut my hair in front of an assembly, but I am so proud to share that we were able to raise \$2310 for the foundation along with a lot of awareness of Wigs for Kids and cancer research.

It just warms my heart that by embracing change, my hair may be bringing some child joy to have a wig to wear. Importantly, my students saw me embrace change to help others. Catch my smile.



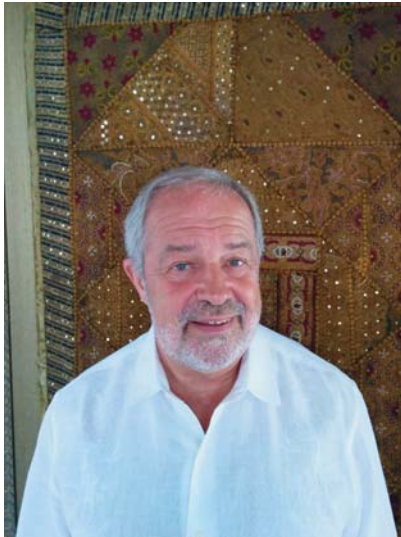
**Suzanne Chavarie** is an Okanagan resident who enjoys being a part of the fabric of her community as an educator, artist and writer. She volunteers with the Central Okanagan Hospice Association and is a member of the Kelowna Art Gallery, Lake Country Art Gallery, End of Life Doulos Association of Canada and the Kelowna Running Club. She enjoys the challenge of weekly trivia hosted at RAILSIDE BREWING with a group called SMARTY PINTS and the joy of sharing books with her Dog Eared Book Club friends.

Top: Cutting Ponytails for Wigs for Kids assembly – two students cut my hair  
Above: Assembly: celebrating our donation of hair and money raised

# CREATIVE ANGER

## Emotional Agility

### Jacques G. LeBlanc



To say the least, the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025 were a new experience for me. After 40 years as a surgeon in the healthcare system, I felt that I was a compassionate person, someone who had explored many of the facets of compassion. Little did I know.

It all began on December 13th 2024 (bad omen) when my younger brother had surgery for colon cancer in Quebec City. Although supposedly a simple operation, he developed multiple complications, including the need for two more surgeries to stop active bleeding. Needless to say my surgical brain worked overtime and I found myself flying urgently to Quebec City to be with him, convinced I could help. Days sitting at the bedside went on; more complications surfaced that required complex treatment. I found myself observing the care provided to my brother, care that I knew so much about, but was not in a position to provide. After all, the surgical staff, residents in training and nursing staff were providing excellent care. My main issue was that my brother had no knowledge of medical or surgical care and I was trying to translate all the information and support him in his physical and emotional pain. I am not sure the staff could understand my approach. To them he was a 71 year old competent man. To me he was my kid brother who had spent his lifetime within the limitations of an undiagnosed learning disability.

Finally, with tremendous resilience, he got better, and was able to transfer to a convalescence home that I had recommended before I flew back home. Unfortunately, after discharge from the convalescence home, he managed only five days at home when he developed a bout of gastroenteritis. I had been calling him every day, and that particular morning I sensed he was acutely sick. I urgently called my cousin asking him to visit my brother. My brother's daughter had also just arrived at his home. We all agreed that it was best to call the ambulance as he was declining quickly. I was very distraught and nervous. When I finally got through to the hospital, I was told he was in the intensive care unit. Wow. What is happening? I was able to reach someone in the ICU who briefly told me my brother was really sick and they were working on him. My wife can attest to my rapid decision-making. I flew overnight to be with him, not entirely knowing how I would find him. I was extremely nervous about losing him.

On arrival at the hospital I found he was improving from the active resuscitation and the good medical care. However, my brother was very confused about what had happened and after discussion he fully agreed to have the notary write a proxy for me so that I could help him understand and navigate his care. With my surgical hat on, the proxy was quickly done and added to his medical file. Through his amazing resilience, he continued to improve and slowly started to heal. I, however, found myself deeply aggravated and frustrated. The

**To me he was my kid brother who had spent his lifetime within the limitations of an undiagnosed learning disability.**

**Compassion in Buddhism goes beyond simply feeling for someone's pain – it's about actively seeking ways to help others. The reward of compassion is often found in the positive impact it has on others and the growth it fosters within oneself.**

proxy was useless; none of the staff, medical or nursing, noted the document and/or agreed to incorporate me in his care. As my brother got stronger and more aware of his care, he became more involved with the staff. It was clear to me that I had become a 'problem'. My expectation that I would be part of his care planning was actively denied by the staff, and it left me angry as my aim was to see that my brother was not only given good care but was aware of what was being done and knew the choices that were being made. This was a daily struggle for me without resolution until I stopped pushing and began to look at the whole concept of compassion. After another three weeks in Quebec City I realized that his health was improving and the staff were getting organized for his discharge planning. Discharge planning became another frustration for me. My brother professed to be able to go home and to care for himself. Sadly, nobody could understand my hesitation. The last time he went home on his own it had not gone well and he was admitted to the ICU. No amount of concern on my part translated into plans that I felt were appropriate. I decided I could do no more and flew home just prior to his discharge.

In Buddhism, compassion is a central virtue and is closely linked to the concept of *karu*. It's defined as a deep, selfless concern for the suffering of others and the genuine wish to alleviate their pain. Compassion in Buddhism goes beyond simply feeling for someone's pain – it's about actively seeking ways to help others, whether that is through direct action, offering support or simply being present. A well-known Buddhist teaching on compassion is the "Four Immeasurables" (or *Brahmavihrs*), which are: Loving-kindness (*Metta*), Compassion (*Karuna*), Sympathetic Joy (*Mudita*) and Equanimity (*Upekkha*).

The difference between empathy and compassion lies primarily in how one responds to the feelings of others. Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's feelings or emotions. When you empathize with someone, you are connecting emotionally and recognizing someone else's pain or joy. It does not involve action. Compassion goes a step further than empathy. It is not just about feeling or understanding someone's suffering; it also involves a desire to alleviate that suffering. Compassion is empathy in action, where you feel compelled to help, support or make the situation better in some way. In Buddhism it's a more active response.

While compassion may not offer immediate material rewards, its emotional, psychological and relational benefits can be incredibly valuable. Ultimately, the reward of compassion is often found in the positive impact it has on others and the growth it fosters within oneself. Did I want a personal reward for helping my brother? Perhaps, in the form of respect. I realized I had some soul searching to do.

Compassion can definitely be frustrating at times. When you deeply care about someone or a situation, you may feel helpless or overwhelmed by the desire to ease their suffering but feel powerless to do so. It can also be draining, especially if you are constantly giving emotional support to others without taking time for yourself. Additionally, seeing people struggle without making progress, or feeling that your compassion is not being appreciated or reciprocated, can create a sense of frustration. There is a complex emotional experience that involves empathy, care and, sometimes, a sense of being stuck or unsure of how to help.

**When compassion and creativity come together, they can lead to meaningful outcomes. Engaging my creativity and expressing myself through written words is where I practise self-compassion,**

Frustration and compassion might seem like opposing forces at first, but they can actually work together in meaningful ways. Frustration typically arises when things are not going as we expect, either in our goals or emotions. It can lead to stress, impatience and sometimes even anger (that would be me). On the other hand, compassion is about understanding, patience and kindness, often directed towards others but also towards oneself.

Compassion and creativity are also two powerful qualities that can deeply enrich our lives and the world around us. When compassion and creativity come together, they can lead to meaningful outcomes. Compassionate creativity might involve using creative skills to solve social problems – making art that resonates with others on an emotional level, or building communities that nurture empathy and understanding.

As I have examined my experience I have come to appreciate that frustration can also fuel creativity by pushing boundaries, motivating one towards innovative problem solving. On a personal basis, it can be therapeutic as one channels emotional energy and acceptance of imperfection. Acceptance of imperfection is always hard, perhaps even more so in my deep surgical personality. Some of the greatest works of art, science and innovation have come from people who were frustrated with the status quo and sought to break free from its limitations.

However, it is important to note that, if you do not take care of yourself while providing compassion, it can lead to “compassion fatigue”. This occurs when the emotional burden of constantly giving to others without adequate self-care causes burnout, that is, emotional and mental exhaustion. Such burnout often affects caregivers, healthcare professionals, social workers, counsellors or anyone who regularly provides emotional support or care to others in distress. It is crucial to avoid depleting our own energy and well-being. Practising self-compassion can help us manage frustration and accept that setbacks and challenges are part of being human. Self-compassion opens up space for growth and learning instead of self-blame. I learned I may need to work on that aspect of compassion.

Choosing to write about my experience has been really important. After months of turmoil, turmoil in trying to support and advocate for my brother, turmoil in my private life being away for a long period of time, turmoil in my mental state, I finally got back home and reflected upon empathy, compassion, frustration and self-compassion. The end result was to identify the complexity of my emotional experiences. So much of my identity as a surgeon, my ego, how I identified as an older brother and sibling in a family of four became evident to me. I am a caregiver at heart and always will be. I know now that I must care for myself as well, and what I see as a need may not be seen in the same way by others. Recognizing my needs and articulating my perspective in my writing has helped resolve the conflict.

My writing practice began a number of years ago when retirement was a much greater adjustment than I had anticipated. Engaging my creativity and expressing myself through written words is where I practise self-compassion, where I find new opportunities for growth and expand my emotional agility.

# ART IN ACTION

## In Response

### Penn Kemp



Photo: Bryan Lavery, McMichael Gallery

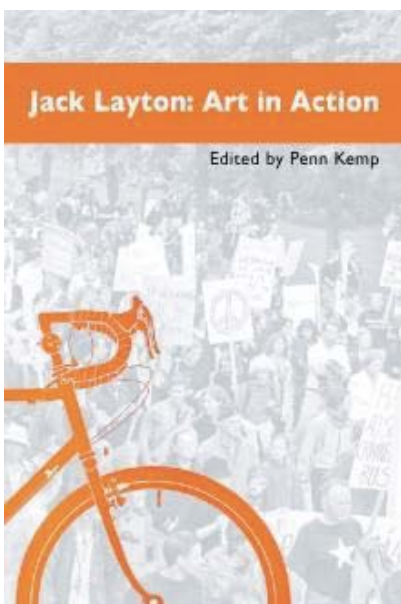
Art in action: that's my motto. I believe in the power of poetry to move readers/listeners to participate in their communities. In reacting to the tumult of 2025, I have expanded my activism from projects already completed to projects ongoing for decades. The demand for articulating protest is more imperious than ever in these bewildering, unfathomable times. So 2025 began for me with a poem in reaction to Trump's inauguration, now up on <https://thetypescript.com/auguries-of-this-inauguration-by-penn-kemp>

### This Awful Inauguration Day

January 20, 2025

This Awful Inauguration Day augurs dimly for most, and we are not even in the United States. The world awaits uncertain of outcome, certain only that meanness prevails of heart and intent. We've dropped into the well of offal. An Awful Inauguration Day augurs well for the unduly rich but poorly for poor dispossessed and for poor middle class. This Awful Inauguration Day augurs ill for tariffs, for taxing the health of nations, for all illegal aliens and alienated arts. This Awful Inauguration Day augurs dimly for us all, and we aren't even in the Year of the slippery Wood Snake till January 29. This Awful Inauguration Day crows triumph for the cock of the walk, king for a day, for another four years. We withhold, withstand. We don't withdraw. We march, we hold on, hold to truth as we know it. We refuse. We are other. We are alien. And we protest.

Jack Layton: *Art in Action*, Quattro Books



"Art in action" is also the title of an anthology I edited in response to New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton's untimely death in 2011: *Jack Layton: Art in Action*, <http://quattrobooks.ca/books/jack-layton-art-in-action/>. This collection of anecdotes features people's experiences with and observations of Layton over the years. There are dozens of voices from across Canada in the book – poets, writers, musicians and artists of all stripes. The writings include poems, blog posts and eulogies.

*Jack Layton: Art in Action* describes Jack's involvement in Canadian arts and culture, how his spirit continues to influence activism in Canada today. His interest in the Canadian cultural landscape was an underlying presence throughout his career. *Art in Action* encourages readers to be proactive and,

**Jack (Layton)  
surrounded himself  
with artists. I think he  
felt a similar spirit in  
the artistic type.**

as Jack would say, “Never turn down an opportunity to serve!” *Jack Layton: Art in Action* commemorates Jack Layton’s influence on Canadian arts and culture, encouraging readers to actively effect positive change.

I first met Jack in the early eighties. As a young city councillor, he was helping us Toronto Islanders defend our homes, houses that Metro wanted to demolish for parkland. The Islanders won that fight, in part due to his help. Later, when his younger sister, Nancy Layton, married my husband’s brother, Jack welcomed me into the family. He called me sister; I called him outlaw, because of such an extended relationship. We’d have long philosophical discussions about the role of the arts.

Jack surrounded himself with artists. I think he felt a similar spirit in the artistic type. He himself was very musical, with perfect pitch. He was wholeheartedly behind government funding for the arts. Without him, I know I wouldn’t have been so politically engaged. Jack made me into a performance activist.

The man I knew privately was the same man we knew publicly. I admired his integrity. He wouldn’t allow any of his party members to launch personal attacks (unlike the Conservative Party’s past and current strategy). He had a real sense of humour. He loved to laugh, even at himself. He was always up for a party, for dancing, for singing. He was forever curious, meeting people gladly. Almost everyone who met him said they felt special in his presence because he really learned to listen and would focus on you, no matter who you were. It didn’t matter to Jack if you were a cabinet minister or a cabinet maker.

When Jack died in August 2011, I wondered how to pay homage. Palimpsest Press contacted me within a week and asked me to write a whole book on his legacy. I preferred to invite contributors as a collective enterprise, in keeping with Jack’s vision of society. Allan Briesmaster, the consulting editor for Quattro Books, came aboard in June of 2012, when I talked to him about the work in process. Quattro was behind the project thereafter. If it was excellent writing that said something new about Jack and his influence on Canadians, then it was in. The book was supposed to be 150 pages but the final outcome was double that; there was so much good material. *Jack Layton: Art in Action* is a truly inspiring cornucopia of anecdotes, reflections, poems and images infused with Jack’s spirit, and with the spirits of many who were touched and motivated by his example. You’ll have to read the book for specific examples!

In this photo, Jack and I are performing my “Poem for Peace in Two Voices”, in English and French. My poem is another study in activism, having been translated into 136 languages and performed world-wide over 30 years.

The most recent election has had me pondering what might have been. Now that we have a confirmed new prime minister in Mark Carney, I wonder what kind of PM Jack could have been. He would have maintained his ongoing zest for social justice. He would have been fair-minded, decisive and compassionate. He would have been beloved. His way of handling diplo-

Jack Layton and Penn recite “Poem for Peace in Two Voices”





Cover image of Penn's new *Lives of Dead Poets*, with painting by James Kemp  
<https://abovegroundpress.blogspot.com/2025/02/new-from-aboveground-press-lives-of.html>

## Poems are dear to my heart as a paean to the lifelong contributions of some marvellous writers.

macy or controversy or opposition was to be the consummate listener. He would treat every person on the level where they had something in common. Jack's life was a work of art capable of igniting us into positive, caring action. He always had the whole picture in mind. Now, I would imagine, Jack wants for us all to bond together to get things done. He is an ongoing mentor to Canadians, on how to work, how to play and how to act effectively to create change. How he has been missed!

It grieves me that so many of my poems are eulogies. In 2025, I have responded to loss with many laments. Their commonality is a sense of adventure in the face of the inevitable. My chapbook, *Lives of Dead Poets*, was published earlier this year. These poems are dear to my heart as a paean to the lifelong contributions of some marvellous writers.

The cover image in *Lives of Dead Poets* is from a painting by James Kemp. Here's a poem from the book that best illustrates how I acknowledge our cultural past with poets whose work still affects their readers:

### Die Verse

As if. What matters. As if. What's left.  
 As if. We have only our elegies. As if.

Even the need for elegy. As if remembering  
 and inventing—*invenio*—as if.

As I come upon. As I discover.  
 As if in passing through this vale.

As if memory's world is  
 as if trudging up sludge,

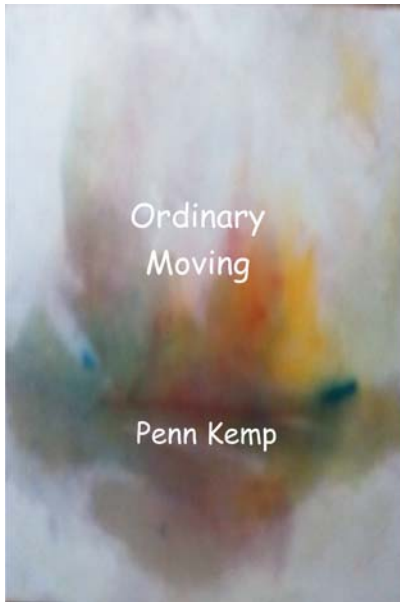
As if the word that springs to  
 mind is devotion, as if, despite

the mess, life's unholy  
 business forever left

unfinished. Dead  
 poets, by your name

we shall know you,  
 by your work

Another brand-new collection, *Ordinary/Moving*, which came out last April for National Poetry Month is available in print (<https://www.silverbowpublishing.com/ordinary-moving.html>) and e-book (Kindle, <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0F1BS13WD/>), is one more defence strategy of mine, an antidote to all the overwhelm we are daily experiencing in the news. Such perceptions are for me best expressed in poetry. A memoir in verse, the poems in *Ordinary/Moving* present a childhood begun during World War II moving through the staid fifties and into



Cover image of *Ordinary/Moving*, art by James Kemp

**Penn Kemp** has received the inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award from the League of Canadian Poets. She has participated in Canadian cultural life for 60 years – writing, editing and publishing poetry, fiction and plays. Her first book of poetry, *Bearing Down*, was published by Coach House, 1972. She's since published 30+ books of poetry, prose and drama, seven plays and 10 CDs of spoken word, and edited a number of anthologies by Canadian writers. Her work explores environmental and feminist concerns, though she is best known as a sound poet. Delighting in multimedia, poet and playwright Penn is active across the web. Two new collections, *Lives of Dead Poets* (<https://abovegroundpress.blogspot.com/2025/02/new-from-aboveground-press-lives-of.html>) and *Ordinary/Moving* (<https://www.silverbowpublishing.com/ordinary-moving.html>) are out now. Updates: [www.pennkemp.weebly.com](http://www.pennkemp.weebly.com), [www.facebook.com/pennkempopoet](https://www.facebook.com/pennkempopoet) and [www.pennkemp.substack.com](http://www.pennkemp.substack.com). Penn is delighted to celebrate this issue of *Sage-ing: The Journal of Creative Aging*, for "the duty of such beauty is to bloom!"

the (in)famous sixties... raising kids in the seventies... and skipping ahead to my own seventies, watching grandchildren. The poems articulate the momentous shifts in consciousness that these decades offered. The London, Ontario, artistic scene in which I grew up was an exciting foment of new ideas: art in action. My father, an abstract painter, was very involved, and so art was my milieu. Art was the means to articulate, sometimes to transcend difficult circumstances. As always, I respond to the dreadful by concentrating on beauty in art or in nature:

The duty of  
such beauty  
is just  
to  
bloom

All this activism over the decades has been recently acknowledged, to my surprise and delight: see <https://poets.ca/nvw2025/#life>. To be the inaugural winner of the League of Canadian Poets' new Lifetime Achievement Award is a profound honour, given the wealth of senior poets across Canada. In accepting this award, I'd like to pay tribute to our elder poets, for whom this ongoing award is so pertinent. Throughout 60 years of writing and publishing, poetry has been my lifeline. But there is so much more to explore! At 80, I feel at the beginning of all that poetry can offer... I still stare daily at the blank page until words unfurl.

#### Other Projects:

*POEMS IN RESPONSE TO PERIL*, an anthology for Ukraine. Edited by Richard-Yves Sitoski and me. We raised \$3000 for Ukrainian artists and recorded poems as well: <https://www.rsitoski.com/poems-in-response-to-peril>. It includes my poem, <https://youtu.be/VhDPMd4iqll?si=c65Ykfk4Rz0q1GRk>, written for the National Poetry Month theme of "Intimacy". In previous issues, *Sage-ing* has featured this anthology. Tragically, the war in Ukraine is ongoing.

*Poem for Peace in Many Voices*. You can see Rachel Thompson's glorious video for the poem, with a reading by many translators in London, Ont.: <https://vimeo.com/148164038>.

Here's my poem for International Women's Day, #IWD: "Choose to Challenge", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThguVNENewQ>

# FEEL THE HEARTBEAT OF EXPRESSION WITHIN YOU

## Susan Leblanc



While cell pour painting, a fluid art technique where cells (small, bubble-like formations) are created in the paint by introducing substances like silicone oil or isopropyl alcohol, may not be considered a serious form of art, it does offer a surprising opportunity for authentic SELF expression for everyone. SELF expression has been a part of human existence for millennia, but it is gaining momentum in a way that perhaps we have not yet seen before. Global happenings suggest there are two collectives of thought vying for greater influence in the shaping of one's SELF and humanity. One extolls the importance of remaining within a prescribed, patriarchal order, suppressing anything that does not align with that form, and one represents the freedom for everyone to speak and express themselves for who they truly, authentically are, 'the Divine Feminine', if you will. I do not subscribe to one being more important than the other, for our divine nature is composed of both. The Divine Feminine, however, is not simply a counterbalance to masculine energy. Rather, it is the originating pattern upon which all existence is templated. I do believe that we have existed with an undercurrent of Divine Feminine, which has been deeply suppressed and is currently seeking expression. How does this expression happen and what does it look like?

I have been exploring these questions for a number of years now and have found that the key to accessing and expressing the Divine Feminine

within, the force of creation, is to engage my creativity and allow for that creative energy to be expressed without planning, contrivance, expectation or judgement. I am speaking of creativity not as something to do but something to allow. Embodied life force that flows through us seeking a natural form of expression that is not in the mind or thought but rather in our bodies – in our hands and able to make visual, tactile, experiential expressions. The meaning is not meant to be discernible through representation, but through a felt sense of resonance. That felt sense of resonance is unique for each of us. It is our soul communing from within our very being, a calling

Cell pour painting 1





Cell pour painting 2

## The Divine Feminine does not create the future. She remembers it into being.

card of sorts. Listening, engaging that voice from within is the essence of creative expression and comes not from a pursuit of perfection but from the quiet and purposeful surrendering to one's heart. That voice within is your SELF, your 'Soul Evolving Love Form', making its SELF heard.

For me the journey of knowing and expressing my SELF is not only a passion, it is a calling. It is a deep ancestral drum that beats, a heartbeat within the hollow of my bones. It is the Divine Feminine, the universal feminine energy of creation attracting my attention and no longer asking for expression but demanding it.

Engaging one's creative energy may be akin to meeting someone new and building a relationship with that person based on remembering who you are in your heart. The Divine Feminine creates through relationship, never in isolation. This energy rises from the person within the person you appear to be. While an exciting proposition for some, for others it may be daunting.

How does one access the Divine Feminine, the life force within? How does one give expression to

something we may not be clear about or understand and perhaps even fear? My sense is that sensing the Divine Feminine requires a gentle hand with the courage to unveil and allow whatever emerges. That emergence is the movement, the flow of Divine Feminine rising within and then attuning with the materials used for expressing and allowing the flow within to be expressed: unfettered, unencumbered, undomesticated, unburdened, allowing of that which is informing your authentic self-expression to emerge.

This 'allowing' is no small effort and stops many at the doorway of trying any creative expression technique. Beginning may be met with trepidation because for many responding to an invitation from within requires crossing the threshold of your outer and inner worlds and engaging your creativity, informed by a deeper, universal, divine feminine life force. Creativity spirals as each expression cycles back, informing its own origin point, and creating temporal loops that exist outside conventional time. When you create from this awareness, you are not beginning something new. Rather, you are completing a cycle that began before you were conscious of it. The Divine Feminine does not create the future. She remembers it into being.

Cell pour painting is a technique in acrylic pour art that allows anyone, regardless of experience, to engage their creative energy in a simple, playful and approachable way. It is a technique where small, round 'cells' or bubbles of colour rise to the surface of the paint creating a marbled or textured effect.



Cell pour painting 3

**The alchemical process of blooming is the magic: the Divine Feminine creates energy within.**

The cells are formed by adding silicone or a cell additive to paint. The silicone or cell additive has a different density than each paint colour and a different viscosity. When the paint is poured onto the canvas, the silicone or additive, being less dense, rises to the surface, taking some of the pigment with it to create the blooming cell effect. Heat can be applied to enhance the blooming.

The magic is in the blooming. The materials and technique used in cell pour painting provide a visual, tangible representation of accessing creative energy and experiencing the flow of that energy as it emerges in the form of blooming cells. The alchemical process of blooming is the magic: the Divine Feminine creates energy within, attuned with the paint, medium and heat, expressed without expectation, judgement or plan. It is true SELF expression. The process allows for playfulness, vulnerability, freedom and self discovery.

Listen, feel the heartbeat of creation within you. Engage your creativity and allow it full expression through cell pour painting. At the very least you will have an experience of your authentic SELF to honour and recognize the mystery and magic within.

**Susan LeBlanc** is an intrepid traveller of the inner self. She began her experience with intuitive painting in 2006. It was an introduction to a form of self-knowing and expression that was free of rules, plans and objectives, a far cry from the world of healthcare where she had practised as a nurse, educator and leader for over 25 years. Since that first experience with intuitive painting she has continued to explore various artistic mediums for self-expression and has offered opportunities to those who are seeking a deeper knowing of themselves through creative expression. She lives with her husband of 25 years and their mini dachshund, Luna, in Kelowna, B.C.

# THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

## Finding Inspiration in Elderhood

**Robert MacDonald**

*“Creativity represents a miraculous coming together of the uninhibited energy of the child with its apparent opposite and enemy, the sense of order imposed on the disciplined adult intelligence.”* Norman Podhoretz

To be creative is to find a way to discover and enable the beautiful in the everyday. To walk in a garden of your own making is to realize that all the choices you made in your planting journey have resulted in a moment of horticultural glory, the flowers rising into the sun, the bees and birds feasting on pollen, the understory a fecund cycle of rise and fall, the joys and failures just part of the story of life and death.

If history is any guide, every time we humans have found new ways to observe the universe, our understanding of ourselves and our place in that universe has been forever altered. When Galileo turned his telescope towards Jupiter in 1609, he observed moons orbiting the giant planet, a discovery that destroyed the notion that everything in heaven orbited the earth.

People rarely ask what’s the use of a Picasso painting, a Mozart symphony or Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. Such pinnacles of human creativity change our perspective of our place in the universe. Science, art, music and literature have the capacity to amaze and excite, dazzle and bewilder, inform and elevate. It is that aspect – their cultural contribution, their humanity – that is perhaps their most important feature, and future.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote about what he called “self-actualizers”: creative people who appreciate the world around them with a sense of awe and wonder. To be creative, he insisted, we need “less fear of ridicule, of humiliation and of failure”; we need to become more “Taoistic in the sense of humility, non-interference, receptivity.”

Every child has wondered at some time where we came from and how we got here. That we can try and answer such questions by first imagining and then building devices to peer out into the almost invisible cosmos looking for something beyond us and our petty self-indulgences, and beyond our wildest dreams, stands as a testament to the persistent curiosity and ingenuity of humankind – the qualities that we should most celebrate about being human.

When we grow into our elderhood, we look back over the life we have lived, and we use the wisdom we have achieved to reach into the cosmos for the spark of creativity that lives inside us all, and from that spark we start the fire of our explorations.

**To be creative is to find a way to discover and enable the beautiful in the everyday. The psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote about what he called “self-actualizers”: creative people who appreciate the world around them.**

*“If you want to build a boat, do not instruct the men to saw wood, stitch the sails, prepare the tools and organize the work, but make them long for setting sail and travel to distant lands.” – Antoine De Saint-Exupéry*

**Rigorous pursuit of the thrill of discovery is essential in achieving creative elderhood.**

While some elders become more conservative as they drift up into the nearer-my-god-to-thee in years, ageing makes others more liberal, freer, lenient, tolerant, radical and creative. Such elders embrace progressive ideas and causes that they might have leaned away from in their middle years as they embraced market dogma.

Rigorous pursuit of the thrill of discovery is essential in achieving creative elderhood. Picasso observed, “It is enthusiasm of which we have the most need, we [the old].” Those who maintain enthusiasm are the creative elders.

Creative elders tend to be more self-assertive and independent, and frequently resist limitations and authority more than their less creative peers. They have a remarkable tolerance for ambiguity. Being creative means taking risks, even inviting periodic failure, which is experienced as a normal part of the process, and results in a person who is more resilient.

Being a creative elder implies that we have had more and varied experiences than at earlier stages of life. Sensitive and reflective elders develop an eye for the ambiguity or tragedy inherent in life’s important themes. Love and hate, life and death, fortune and misfortune, pleasure and pain, freedom and bondage: each of these pairs of terms no longer has one

clear and simple meaning. We elders become more nuanced in our approach to ideas and values.

As we grow into creative elderhood there is a softening of our previous dogmatisms, coupled with a “live and let live” attitude about things we were once passionate about, as well as a forgiving approach to the foibles of ourselves and others. Creative elders are, in a special sense, survivors, and we have developed for ourselves a sense of what works and what does not; what we can realistically hope for and what are pipe dreams; what is essential and what is trivial.

Creativity is an asset that is both appreciated and utilized at any age, but is especially cherished by elders. Some artists, like Picasso, demonstrate a brightening of spirit and a renewed outburst of invention as they grow into elderhood, which should be celebrated. The differences between those of us who start artistic activity late in life, as therapy or self-expression, and those whose professional work degenerates into formulas, cookie-cutters and self-imitations, and the exceptional aging artist, are found in creativity, cognitive skills, experience and self-confidence.

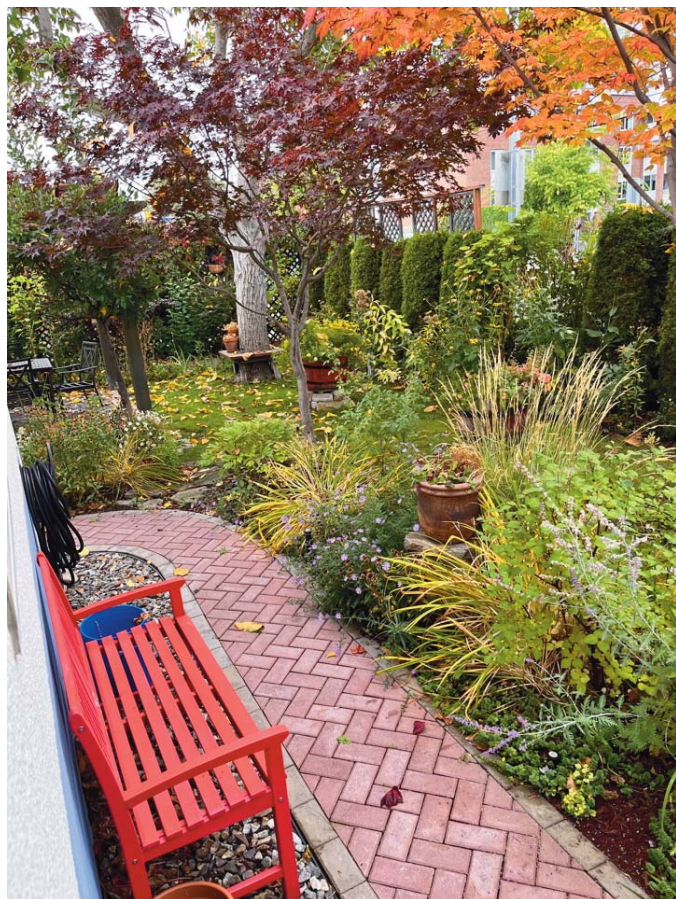
As we ponder our creative elderhood, there are a

My garden in spring



**In elderhood, it's better to think of our creative work as something we are, not something we do.**

My garden in fall



number of themes that occur that provide insight into how we can maintain our child-like sense of wonder and sharpen our creative tools, while at the same time avoid the pitfalls of vanity and self-delusion.

The key to creativity is openness. According to one well-known test administered by psychologists in the 1960s, writers tend to score really high on tests measuring psychopathology. However, those same writers also scored unusually high on tests measuring mental health. This paradoxical finding may be at least partially explained by one facet of personality that is highly correlated with creativity: openness. “Being open to and curious about the full spectrum of life – both the good and the bad, the dark and the light – may be what leads writers to score high on some characteristics that our society tends to associate with mental illness,” write Kaufman and Gregoire in *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mystery of the Creative Mind* (2016, Penguin Random House), “at the same time that it leads them to become more grounded and self-aware.”

In elderhood, it's better to think of our creative work as something we are, not something we do. Most people probably already know that “follow your passion” is not very helpful advice. But there may be a way to think about that cliché that turns it into something more useful. Kaufman and Gregoire summarize some fascinating research on the idea of “harmonious passion,” which is the idea that we've folded some creative pursuit – dancing, drawing, writing, whatever – into our identity. It's become a part of who we understand ourselves to be.

“Obsessive passion,” on the other hand, is marked by anxiety and self-consciousness; it means you derive your self-worth from your ability to best a rival on some creative task, for example. It goes back to intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, in other words. Are you doing this for you, or to impress those around you?

Despite all the stress and tears those with obsessive passion pour into their work, it seems that those who are harmoniously passionate about their creative work are more likely to achieve the high goals they've set for themselves. You do it because you love it, and the accomplishments come along almost as a by-product of your love for the work. Even more important, research has also shown that “when we feel our work is both emotionally interesting and personally meaningful, accomplishing a task is significantly less mentally taxing.” If we can just lighten up, in other words, we'll be rewarded by both getting more work done and enjoying the work we're doing.

**Our word is still ours,  
but it calls back to us  
from the heart of  
another person, or a  
circle of people, within  
which it now dwells.**

*“The sound of the sea, the curve of a horizon, wind in leaves, the cry of a bird leave manifold impression in us. And suddenly, without our wishing it at all, one of these memories spills from us and finds expression in musical language. I want to sing my interior landscape with the simple artlessness of a child.” – Claude Debussy*

To act in these ways is to give our word. We send it out and it carries our integrity, our fidelity, our trustworthiness, our truth. Our word is still ours, but it calls back to us from the heart of another person, or a circle of people, within which it now dwells. Such a commitment does not predict the future or set it in stone. It makes a certain kind of future possible.

A covenant is not a contract. It is not made and signed and sealed once and for all, sent to the attorneys for safekeeping or guarded under glass in a museum. A covenant is not a static artifact and it is not a sworn oath: Whereas, whereas, whereas. Therefore, I will do this, or I'll die, so help me God. A covenant is a living, breathing aspiration, made new every day. It can't be enforced by consequences but it may be reinforced by forgiveness and by grace, when we stumble, when we forget, when we mess up.

A covenant is a promise we make with and to ourselves, about the kind of person we want to be, the kind of life we mean to have, together with other people and with all other living things. It is the life-sustaining fluency of covenant, from covenir, to travel together. We will walk together with each other towards the lives we mean to lead, towards the world we mean to have a hand in shaping, the world of compassion, equity, freedom, joy and gratitude. Covenant is the work of intimate justice.

# FROM THE DARKNESS, LIGHT UP KELOWNA ...

**Laura David**

Recently there was an opening of the artistic installation in Kelowna called *Light Up Kelowna*. It comprises two outdoor public exhibition locations, a digital installation through the walkway of the Kelowna Art Walk, and an outdoor urban screen at the Kelowna Community Theatre. Experiencing the exhibitions creates an illuminating audio visual experience that indeed brings light into the midst of the downtown cultural district in an imaginative way which opens a community up to new perspectives on how art can be part of community enjoyment.

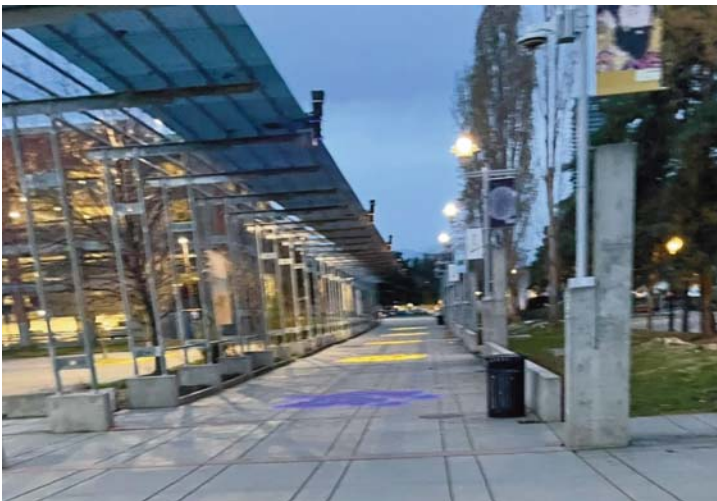
The project originated with Kirsteen McCulloch, the executive director of the Arts Council of Central Okanagan, ARTSCO. It is an open-air exhibition space for artists to come and show their work through a digitization of the space. The installations are experienced by moving through the spaces while seeing and hearing. The two new digital exhibition locations are accessible spaces for all people to gather in community. “Whether you are

home-insecure and you’re living on the streets or you’re walking to a hockey game at Prospera Place with your very expensive tickets, it’s an equal opportunity to explore the space,” says McCulloch.

The concept of *Light Up Kelowna* came about in the midst of the COVID pandemic and the need to find a new way of not just artistic programming, but to create new ways of exploring art when public institutions and all public buildings were closed. During the dark time of COVID, McCulloch remembers thinking, “What on earth are we going to do?” The idea of light kept coming to her, in response to the dark time. McCulloch reached out to Bryce Traister who’s the dean of the University of British Columbia Okanagan’s (UBCO) Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies (FCCS). In a conversation around community partnerships she pitched the idea of *Light Up Kelowna* to him. They collaborated and that was the genesis of this current installation.

McCulloch first decided to apply for one of the

**Below:** *Light Up at Art Walk*  
**Bottom:** *Light Up Urban Screen*





Top: Light Up 2  
 Middle: Light Up 3  
 Above: Light Up 4, close-up of digital projector

grants available from Health Canada in 2021, but they got rejected. It took a lot to pull another application together and persevere, but it allowed for lots of conversation and some thoughtful planning. The Health Canada grant was opened up again in 2022; the team reapplied but again weren't selected. The third time was a charm and, once you get a grant, it then becomes more viable to get other grants. Three grants came together, and the collaborators were able to work not just on the Kelowna Art Walk installation, but also to create the Urban Screen installation at the Kelowna Community Theatre. These are two separate projects, but they share a common artistic theme and can be activated separately or together.

"*Light Up Kelowna* will be a dynamic, ever-evolving public art initiative, rather than a more static public art experience," McCulloch also said, passionately. ARTCO, with collaborators at UBCO and beyond, will continue to run exhibitions in the two locations, in conjunction or separately. These exhibitions will change as themes change and as technology changes. They will use new technologies as they evolve, with newly commissioned artists and the digitization of their artwork, to create new experiences.

Right now McCulloch and the ARTCO *Light Up Kelowna* committee are working through what concept they want next at the Urban Screen in the Kelowna Community Theatre. Introducing the audio component will be a big addition because that means, even if the imagery isn't seen until later at night in the summertime, there could be an interesting audio experience that passers-by can take in on their way to the theatre.

*Light Up Kelowna* is an innovative art project in Kelowna, for now and into the future. Kirsteen McCulloch of ARTCO used creative ingenuity, seeing a vision in the darkness of the pandemic for the community of Kelowna. She and the members of the design team that made *Light Up Kelowna* possible – Dr. Bryce Traister, Dr. Miles Thorogood and Dr. Alexandra Dulic – had the tenacity and perseverance to create a project four years in the making. The conceptualization may have originated from the darkness of COVID, but the vision of *Light up Kelowna* illuminates a bigger picture: how the arts can be a way to provide arts for mental wellness in the outdoors in the Kelowna community. Importantly, this evolving installation is and will continue to be accessible; anyone in the community can gather in community to enjoy the public outdoor exhibition space. *Sage-ing* is glad to share that McCulloch intends to continue championing her cause for accessibility in the enjoyment of the creative arts in public spaces.

Photos by Laura David, except the photo of the Urban Screen by ARTSCO [www.artsco.ca](http://www.artsco.ca), used with their permission.

# WHEN BALLET SPEAKS

**Karen Close**

**The life force of humans when we speak with body, heart and imagination.**

Last night I attended Ballet Kelowna's 24/25 season finale of *Vividus: Full of life*. I have been watching our ballet company grow since its first performance in the fall of 2003, the same year I arrived in Kelowna. I remember toasting 2015 with the new director Simone Orlando. This decade has brought such depth of performance as the troupe has grown. Last night's performance 'yelled out' the power, the life force, of humans when we speak with body, heart and imagination.

"The evening opens with a piece I created in response to Igor Stravinsky's famed composition, *The Rite of Spring*, widely considered to be one of the most influential pieces of music from the 20th century. *Rite of Spring* under autocratic rule and is influenced by the increasingly divisive nature of global politics. The choreography is fervent, complementing the score's avant-garde approach to rhythm and meter. While the original 1913 production of *Rite of Spring* tells a story of sacrifice, I decided to change the narrative, ultimately freeing the protagonist from her oppressor in this raw exploration of liberation." – Simone Orlando, Artistic Director and CEO Ballet Kelowna

As Simone introduced this opening piece she wryly explained that her work on it began in 2019 and how glad she is to see its strong relevance today.

In the wordless final scene the personally obsessed, almost blindly driven autocrat repeatedly rams his head into the collective of the other dancers who have been stripped bare, yet did not yield. Instead they triumphantly hold him aloft – his downfall rule their trophy.

"*The Chosen One [in this piece] questions and rejects the concept of sacrifice and instead advocates for freedom and liberty. In a world of chaos, brutality and authoritarianism, hope prevails and democracy has the last word.*" – Simone Orlando

Concluding the evening was a performance of *Le Carnaval des Animaux* by Guillaume Côté. It is a blast of colour and frenzied, cheeky movements you can't forget even long after you leave the theatre. Each performer allows their individual natures to emerge playfully.

"I set out to create a dance counterpoint: a cel-

The autocrat





Celebrating uniqueness

**The power of pure expression in *Vividus: Full of life* delighted an audience ready to embrace a dream of all-powerful life force.**

ebriation of movement that mirrors the whimsy of nature and the animal kingdom.” Guillaume Côté

The audience saw the movement and heard the powerful sound of individuals in unison, each celebrating their own uniqueness and life force. I left the theatre proud of our human animal spirit and of how creative spirit reminds us what our species can be.

“It’s the artists who do the dreaming for society.”  
– Méret Oppenheim (1913-1985)

Dreams were a major influence on Oppenheim, a German-born Swiss Dadaist and Surrealist artist. The Surrealists aimed to allow the unconscious mind to express itself, liberating thought and experience from the confines of rationalism and championing human spirit. The power of pure expression in *Vividus: Full of life* delighted an audience ready to embrace a dream of all-powerful life force.

Do you recall this headline from October 2024? “The European Commission has published a call under the Creative Europe Programme for Ukrainian artists to support Ukrainian cultural and creative organisations, artists and professionals.” The call supports the Ukrainian cultural and creative sector’s organisations; artists and professionals are asked to tackle the ongoing and future consequences of the war, in cooperation with organisations from other Creative Europe countries. Although Kelowna’s Ballet’s performance of *Vividus* was not a response to that call, it spoke in rhythm with the global culture of our times and to the hearts of the audience who responded with a thunderous ovation.

# EXPRESSING MORE PERSONALLY ... OR POLITICALLY

**Laura David**

Long before I studied art therapy and learned about the psychological factors that lead to healing through art therapy, I found psychological factors were the case in my own lived experience. Often in my teens, you would find me alone in my bedroom, making art. For me, it was multimedia visual art that was my refuge.

I've learned since that art is therapeutic in that it is a way to deal with times of stress and uncertainty in a healthy way... in whatever form works for a particular person and situation.

Connecting to nature has become an evidence-based healthy way to cope with stress. This knowledge has come up in my art time and again. I love the connection to nature, particularly in the spring as I watch Earth's renewal and rejuvenation. Nature's resilience inspires me once more.

*Resilience. Acrylic on paper, 9" x 12"*



Art also can be a way to find strength and confidence in who you are at a deeper level. Improvisation that reveals things about you to yourself and can be validating, to say the least. Recently, with all of the uncertainty and the threats to our sovereignty as a nation here in Canada, I did some art about my national pride. It was empowering for me to create this piece, which I titled *Strong and Free*, reminding me of the importance of the freedom we have in Canada and the importance of recognizing it and acting on it by voting.

In *Writing Down the Bones* Natalie Goldberg suggests reducing creative inhibitions and pushing one's inner critic to the sidelines where it belongs. She suggests that this can be done in part by writing as a daily practice and forgetting to concern oneself with any kind of grammatical issues and just writing free flow. There are many ways that can inhibit our creativity. Procrastination and often the inner critic stop us from expressing what really is deepest, most meaningful and most vulnerable, whether as writing or painting or whatever happens to be one's artistic muse in the moment.

Goldberg's famous quote, "Write what disturbs



*Strong and Free*. Mixed media on wood panel, 12" x 12"

you, what you fear, what you have not been willing to speak about. Be willing to be split open”, is very fitting for the theme of this issue of *Sage-ing*, which is to write about how you deal with the uncertainty of the present situation and state of affairs in our country and in our world. This task can be daunting to write about, never mind speak about, in our present day’s uncertainty when even our country’s sovereignty is at stake. Who would’ve thought we’d ever be having to consider this? I’ve felt more deeply patriotic now than ever before in my life; because of this, I created *Strong and Free*. I have taken a stand politically about keeping our sovereignty as a nation and doing what I can, which is to speak up about it and not leaving anything to chance. As noted in this collage, at the very least we must vote. This for me is the very first time I have intentionally made a political piece and posted it on social media, and it was quite empowering.

I appreciate local Kelowna artist Jim Demchuk’s point of view in his writing and art on politics in the following contribution.

# PERSONAL OR POLITICAL?



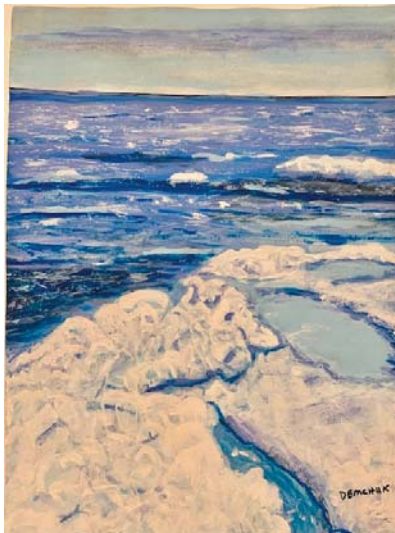
## Jim Demchuk

I think there is a lot of truth to the belief that all art is political. Throughout history art has been used to challenge authority and question societal norms. Toni Morrison, a famous USA author who won the Nobel Prize in Literature, firmly believes this.

*“All good art is political. There are none that isn’t and the ones that try hard not to be political are political by saying we love the status quo.”* – Victoria Powell

Victoria Powell, writer on art, history, culture and politics, believes all art is political and she is on a mission to make art more understandable. I agree and I think art is a reflection of society, an agent of change and a vehicle for expressing ideas and emotions. I believe that artists are inherently sensitive. They can’t overlook the world we live in and the dangers that they see. In some way their sensitivity is displayed either obviously or subliminally in their artwork.

Being primarily an abstract artist, I generally view my work as apolitical. But there are issues/worries that percolate up, and I feel a need to be more vocal in my creativity. Two recent works I completed, *The North Pole* and *The Last Puffin*, reflect my worries for our environment. *The North Pole* is depicted with ice almost all depleted because of our warming planet. *The Last Puffin* is an even darker view of where our planet is going with a lone puffin on a stark rocky outcropping against a green apocalyptic sky.



Left: *The North Pole*  
Below: *The Last Puffin*





Tariffs

My most recent abstract painting, titled *Tariffs*, has more current political intrigue. It was intuitively painted with no preconceived objective or outcome. When I finished it and stepped back I immediately saw a number of similarities to the famous painting *Scream* by Edward Munch. I instantly wanted to title this painting *Tariffs*, which reflected my angst about the Trump tariffs and his attack on Canadian sovereignty. This painting truly reflected my feelings about all the insanity going on south of our border.

First-generation Ukrainian-born and Saskatchewan-raised, **Jim Demchuk** completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Administration (with honours) at the University of Regina and later obtained a Chartered Management Accountant designation. Although primarily a self-taught painter for over 40 years, Jim has taken numerous painting courses/classes/seminars through universities and community colleges and from painters-in-residence, supplemented by studying painting techniques from books and the Internet.

# The Journal of Creative Aging

# SAGE-ING

WITH CREATIVE SPIRIT,  
GRACE & GRATITUDE

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## Our Manifesto

This journal (and our associated website) is about you, and the possibility of you creating the next chapter in the book of your life.

You're familiar with how the other chapters worked: early, childhood, teenage, tempest, tragedy, trial, temptation, partnering, breaking, birthing, making, solving, earning, learning, building, growing, mentoring, celebrating, wising up, and ending up here after all that.

The road of life goes on from where you now find yourself, you're still on it, and the vistas that open before you promise more and maybe better rewards, but only if you engage in the possibilities.

You now get to decide if this next chapter will be a rich and fulfilling one for you, or only the last.

Rather than fading into that good night, might we offer an alternative?

Creative aging is a powerful social and cultural movement that has stirred the imaginations of many communities and people. Also referred to as sage-ing, creative aging takes many forms, and elevates people in many ways.

Most importantly, creative aging encourages and facilitates individual and collective creative pursuits, including writing, crafting, painting, dancing, and an almost unlimited number of other ways to express your creative energy.

It encourages you to find your inner artist, to discover the opportunity to celebrate and elevate, to make the most of the wisdom you've accumulated through the lessons of your life. It pleads for you to speak the truths you've learned, to share your wisdom, to be wise, to sage.

Creative aging helps you discover the source of wellness, which is in your spirit, your will to be, to be well, to share your gift, to explore, to create, to be whole.

Creative aging encourages you to engage with your inner life, to experience the grace of knowledge, to express gratitude for your gifts, and to share them with others on the same journey. By doing so, you open the door to the creative person that lives inside you, the insights you possess, the lessons you can learn through your experience, the discoveries you can share with fellow creators, and the wisdom you can gift to future generations.

Sage-ing: The Journal of Creative Aging exists to help you document your creative pursuits with care and integrity, to honour your truth. It's time for you to join us. Tell your story, make your next chapter.