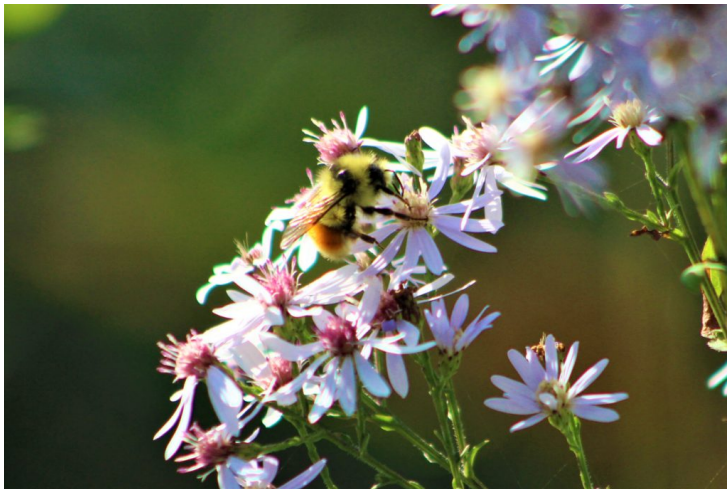


The power of art



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By Nate Smelle

You are not fully appreciating the beauty of North Hastings if you neglect taking the time to soak in the local art scene. It is true that the creativity which earned Bancroft the title of Ontario's most talented town can be accessed year round, however for me there is no better time to appreciate this fundamental element of our local culture than autumn. Yes the backdrop of fall colours leaves even the most cynical among us in awe, but the main reason I say this is that autumn in North Hastings also happens to be Studio Tour season.

While we may be able to enjoy the creations of our local artists in local stores and on gallery walls all year, events such as the Bancroft and Area Autumn Studio Tour give us a unique opportunity to explore the depth of talent living and working here. By opening up their creative spaces to the public each year, we are able to catch a rare glimpse of all the time, technique and labour that goes into each work of art generated by these producers. At the same time we also get the chance to dig into their creative process a bit deeper by picking their brains to see what motivates them to create.

After visiting the studios of glass artist Karen Istead and landscape painter Nancy McKinnon on this year's tour, and speaking with them about their passion to create, I left their place feeling inspired and eager to break in a few paint brushes of my own. What struck me about these conversations was how both artists told me that what they enjoy most about the Studio Tour are the conversations they get to have with their visitors.

Lucky enough to have covered the Studio Tour on several occasions, I do my best each year to visit different artists it features. During these visits I have done my share of brain picking, and of course this year was no different. As someone who enjoys creating things and experimenting with different mediums I have learned more than a few technical tricks of the trade from the artists on this tour that I have been able to employ in my own creations.

Still, as useful as these techniques are, looking back at what I remember most from these encounters are the conversations with the artists about where their passion and inspiration comes from. Often I have found that the artists identify with having a special connection an appreciation of the natural world, fueling their drive to make art. Speaking with Istead and McKinnon while admiring their work and occasionally peering out the windows of their studio spaces on Baptiste Lake, it wasn't difficult to decipher where their inspiration originates.

Sitting there in artist Arne Roosman's kitchen the following week, listening to him passionately explain how each of his creations came into existence, it dawned on me how precious these discussions about art, and explorations of the creative mind truly are. By taking the time to speak with Roosman about his personal connection and history in relation to each piece, not only did I learn about the artist and his work, I also gained insight into a chapter of human history that occurred in many cases before I was born. Feeling like I had put in a new pair of eyeballs by the time I left Roosman's place, I again noticed an overwhelming urge to paint come over

me.

If art is indeed an expression of beauty and truth; and if conversations like those I engaged in with Roosman, Istead and McKinnon have the potential to inspire others to explore their own creativity, then maybe we need to take a better look at the power of art and its ability to shape vibrant and resilient communities.