

The GCAA Presents:

THE PAINTBRUSH BLOG

THIS MONTH AT GUELPH ARTISANS

by Gillian Joseph



If you want to know what it's like to be creative and to come to a strange country from abroad just ask **Irene Kunhegyi**, a Guelph acrylic artist who is very active in the Guelph Creative Arts Association (GCAA). Irene was born in Hungary and when she was eleven her parents decided to leave the conflict and violence that was all around them and move to Canada. Her aunt, who lived in Leamington, Ontario, had visited the family in Hungary and had encouraged them to think about moving to Canada. Once re-located, the family lived with her aunt in Canada for a year and then moved to Guelph where Irene has lived ever since. She is still very close to her cousin, who she considers a sister - calling each other every day and interacting with her as COVID restrictions allow.

A certified ceramics teacher, Irene has been creative in several different forms of art over the years. However, an increasing allergy to chemicals associated with ceramic art that affected her hands prompted Irene to pursue a new creative interest – which turned toward painting. First, Irene and a friend took art courses in watercolour painting. Irene looks back on that time with amusement because she knows that watercolour is one of the hardest types of painting to learn and to master. However, she was a watercolour painter for a number of years before taking a course in acrylic painting, which sparked a particular interest for Irene. “You can do all kinds of things with acrylics. This medium is for me!” she thought at the time....and the rest is history.



Influenced by modern abstract painters, Irene is inspired by the freedom and opportunities for expression in this style of painting. While she is also influenced by realism and enjoys the

occasional attention to finer detail in a painting, Irene feels that her creativity is best expressed through abstract and semi-abstract styles. Primarily painting landscapes, Irene likes to work quickly. Yet she acknowledges something that most artists know, that sometimes paintings do what they want and not what we want them to do. In fact, once, Irene told me, she produced an abstract painting that when finished had a bride and groom painted into it that she hadn't even realized was there!

In the past, Irene attended the Haliburton School of Arts and took week long courses each summer where she met several other inspired artists. Then she transferred to Bridgewater where she continued learning her craft each summer for many years. And now she is an educator herself. A few years ago, Irene ran some very popular workshops for the GCAA which recruited well-known artists around the province to guide workshops on technique and style. However, for the last few years (pre-COVID) Irene has run the GCAA *Play Days* where a person pays \$10 for a day of painting with a group of people who are similarly attracted to a particular style that they would like to explore further.

The workshops are very popular particularly because they include artists of all levels who can be called upon for support and advice when requested by less experienced painters throughout the day.

Irene has won awards for her work at several Ontario



competitions including one run by Collingwood Art Club, where she won first prize for three consecutive years. She has also participated in competitions in Guelph (including First Place at Guelph Spring Art Show and Sale, 2018 – pictured above) and events at other cities across the province. In particular, Irene feels that through entering competitions she has gained confidence when others appreciate the quality of her work and her unique creative style.

Creative genes run deep in Irene's family and she had several relatives who were once artists. She also has two creative adult children that kept her busy in Guelph over the years. She has a son who lives in British Columbia with his family, and a daughter, who is now a teacher and who is also very artistic. In fact, her daughter was once an Olympic pair figure skater who qualified for the Canadian Olympic figure skating team and competed at the *Sarajevo* Olympics.

Irene enjoys painting with friends who are local artists. In particular, she enjoys painting with her friend of many years, local artist Vlasta Kelemen. But what about Irene's plans for future work? "Well," she says "I'll just continue to do my thing!" And what a beautiful "thing" it is.