

The GCAA Presents:

THE PAINTBRUSH BLOG

THIS MONTH AT GUELPH ARTISANS

by Gillian Joseph

A first-place award in the *Overzealous Art Exhibition* in Toronto for a painting of her brother standing by a fire underscored to Celia Britt that she was back where she needed to be. Always Interested in art even as a little girl, the former dental



hygienist got side-tracked when her professional calling took over her academic life - and there was little room or time left to take art courses. In fact, Celia was not even aware that she had nearly lost something that was really important to her. Flash forward to years later and an opportunity to take a watercolour course. Returning home after her first lesson, Celia literally sat down and cried with the overwhelming realization of how much expressing herself through art really meant to her – she felt such a strong creative connection that had laid dormant for so long.

Born in England, Celia's family, both in her youth and her adulthood, moved all over Canada – back and forth from west to east coast. Her father, a machinist by trade, had originally moved the family from the United Kingdom when Celia was very young, searching for a better life...and Canada is where they stayed. “It was so expensive to go back in those days, even for a visit” she reflects. “Just a phone call in the 50s and 60s was more per minute than my parents made per hour - which was beyond comprehension”. Instead, like many newcomers to Canada in those days, Celia and her family wrote lots of letters to family left behind. She still has some of the letters her grandmother wrote – something that Celia always looked forward to receiving and re-reading over and over.

Although her parents were not particularly artistic, Celia's siblings are much more so. She has a brother who is a passionate hobby photographer, a sister who did beautiful handicrafts and sewing and another brother whose talents lie in building



his own home and woodworking. Furthermore, Celia's mother had a cousin, Norman T. Stevenson, who was a watercolour and oil artist who also illustrated children's books in the early 19th century, and whose work was exhibited at the Royal Institute of Watercolour Painters and the Royal Institute of Oil Painters, Countisbury, Devon in England. Art is obviously in her genes!

Once her sons were teenagers, Celia's commitment to art began to grow. She took courses at the Guelph School of Art where she was taught by a number of well-known local artists there. In fact, observing the success of artist friends that she painted with, Celia was led further afield to artist Lorne Winters of Glen Williams, whose work inspires her and from whom she has been taking classes for the last two years.

Her style is representational, sometimes impressionistic, more recently abstract. Impressionist artists such as Monet, one of Celia's favourites, used patches of colour rather than detail to represent gardens, people and locations. Representational art strives to depict reality, but some of the images in the paintings don't always look precisely like those the artist is representing in reality. Celia's move toward a more abstract style was a challenge at first. "It went over my head as to how I should approach it." said Celia

"Then during lockdown in COVID, I started taking an online course *Finding Your Joy* in representational and abstract painting, based in England". Where the control needed for her work as a dental hygienist necessitated restriction, the course in abstract art taught Celia how to loosen her painting technique – but it was tough to grasp. "I had to learn to let go of thinking that you needed to create something that brought others joy, and instead focus on what brings **YOU** joy. When your style is freed up," Celia explains "it just brings that extra splash to paintings that you were missing before". Using a representational approach, Celia's art aims to suspend the viewer in a moment of time; to be able to put themselves in that space that she has painted and to be drawn to it – to



experience it. Celia finds that today people are so busy, so she loves to look at what lies outside of that busyness. What makes people stop and take a breath in that quiet moment inspires her.

Celia's portrait and landscape images are inspired by a love of the work of artists such as Monet, The Canadian Group of Seven, Russian artists Aleksei and Sergei Tkacher and a particular favorite, Australian artist Leon Holmes. In the last four years Celia's work has won awards and placed well in several exhibitions, including one sponsored by Guelph Creative Arts Association as well as a First Place in the *Overzealous Art Exhibit* (entry shown at right), a show that started in Guelph in 2016 and eventually moved to Toronto.

A trip to Portugal a few years ago found Celia in an artistic environment that reminded her about the beauty of the world she loves to paint. The exhibition showcased the work of artists who were called upon to express what they could see in a view through an electron microscope, where the resolution of the minute detail of an object far exceeds that of a regular light microscope, providing insights about the natural world that are impossible to see with the human eye. "In science," explained Celia "they use graphic models to explain how things work. But in this Portugal exhibition, they called upon artists to express what could be observed from an electron microscope". The art depicted the deepest parts of plants and other beautiful things that were observed through this special lens. It included jewelry to wallpaper, paint to sculptures and Celia was blown away by what she saw. "This really Inspired me" she said. "It's such a very spiritual thing to look down an electron microscope and see these images of nature. It makes you look at creation with its designs, colours and shapes and wonder 'God, how did you do that?'" Yet, what's really amazing is not just how beautifully these images are represented through art, but rather how wonderfully these beautiful images are absorbed into observers like Celia, who are, in turn, inspired to put brush to canvas to keep the meaning of these images rippling through time.