

Studio Tours, Festivals,
Business as Usual:

Our Annual Look at Artists Near the Escarpment

By Gloria Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis

Many communities have artists opening their studios to the public on one or two of the colourful weekends in fall, when a day driving through the countryside is a lovely pastime. Yet the best ideas can use refreshing occasionally. The long-time Purple Hills Studio Tour in and around Creemore, is changing this year to a wider arts festival that includes music, theatre and children's events as well as the visual arts, which remain a big focus. Yet whether studio tours, festivals or just business as usual, visual artists continue to thrive close to the Escarpment.



▲ Two showrooms and a studio open onto each other in Maplestone Gallery of Creemore.





▲ Beautiful Babe and owner Suzanne Steeves welcome walk-ins to their Mill St. gallery in Creemore.

◀ Suzanne Steeves, artist-owner of Maplestone Gallery, also teaches mosaic art from her gallery studio. Here, she explains the techniques she will use to create this large heron piece on Wedi board.

On the main drag of Creemore, which is Mill St. in this town, the Maplestone Gallery is a corner storefront space. It's easy to pop in here to see what's new. Everyone who enters is personally inspected by a relaxed, friendly border collie whose sign of greeting is to lift her black and white head and yodel. Not howl, but give a musical, lilting yodel of many notes. "She learned it from our dearly-

departed Tigger, a pound rescue we had for 11 years," says her owner and the gallery's owner, Suzanne Steeves. She is proud of the fact that her gallery is the only one in Canada specializing in contemporary mosaic art. Works by Canadian and international artists who are famous in the field are carried. Marian Shapiro of Australia creates stunning feminine shapes covered with a multitude of colourful pieces

that she calls goddess sculptures, and which sell swiftly. Spanish artist Liza Wheeler's portrait "Ebony," of a black horse's head, is so realistic that it resembles a photograph. Grace Blowers of Colorado incorporates natural elements like wood and moss, as can be seen in her piece "In the Middle of Nowhere." Michigan-based Lin Schorr is often inspired by striking frames that surround each creation. Newfoundland's Terry Nicholls

created a realistic male figure in "The Busker." Jean Loney of Fergus designs realistic fruit, flowers and animals; her work called "Columbine" has the most beautiful colours of green and blue. Works in the gallery range from \$95 to \$9,500. Steeves herself is a mosaic artist. At the time of our interview, she had little of her own work on display, having sold out of most pieces. She created a series of black crows that

◀ Mosaic glass in bright colours from Italy and gold-covered pieces lift the spirit in "Sunrise" by Suzanne Steeves.



Artists

was enormously popular. Her studio is at the back of the gallery, where she's currently creating two pieces, one an image of a rooster and the other, a large heron. "I do a lot of birds," she points out.

"Mosaics are very tactile and colourful," she adds. "It's a very meditative art form. You have to give a lot of concentration to what you place beside each piece. You have to mix colour with your eye, and you have to step back all the time to see the effect from afar. It's a lot harder to undo work in mosaics. If properly done, it lasts forever. Think of Pompeii."

Steeves shows how texture is created by varying the size and material of each small piece. The technique called "crazy paving" gives the impression of dynamic movement. She indicates how the backgrounds and spaces between pieces are important to the work as a whole. "The best artists spend a lot of time on their backgrounds," she says.

Maplestone Gallery, at 705 520 0067, is completing three years of existence this fall, and will be part of the Creemore Arts Festival on Sept. 22 and 23. More information is at www.phahs.ca.

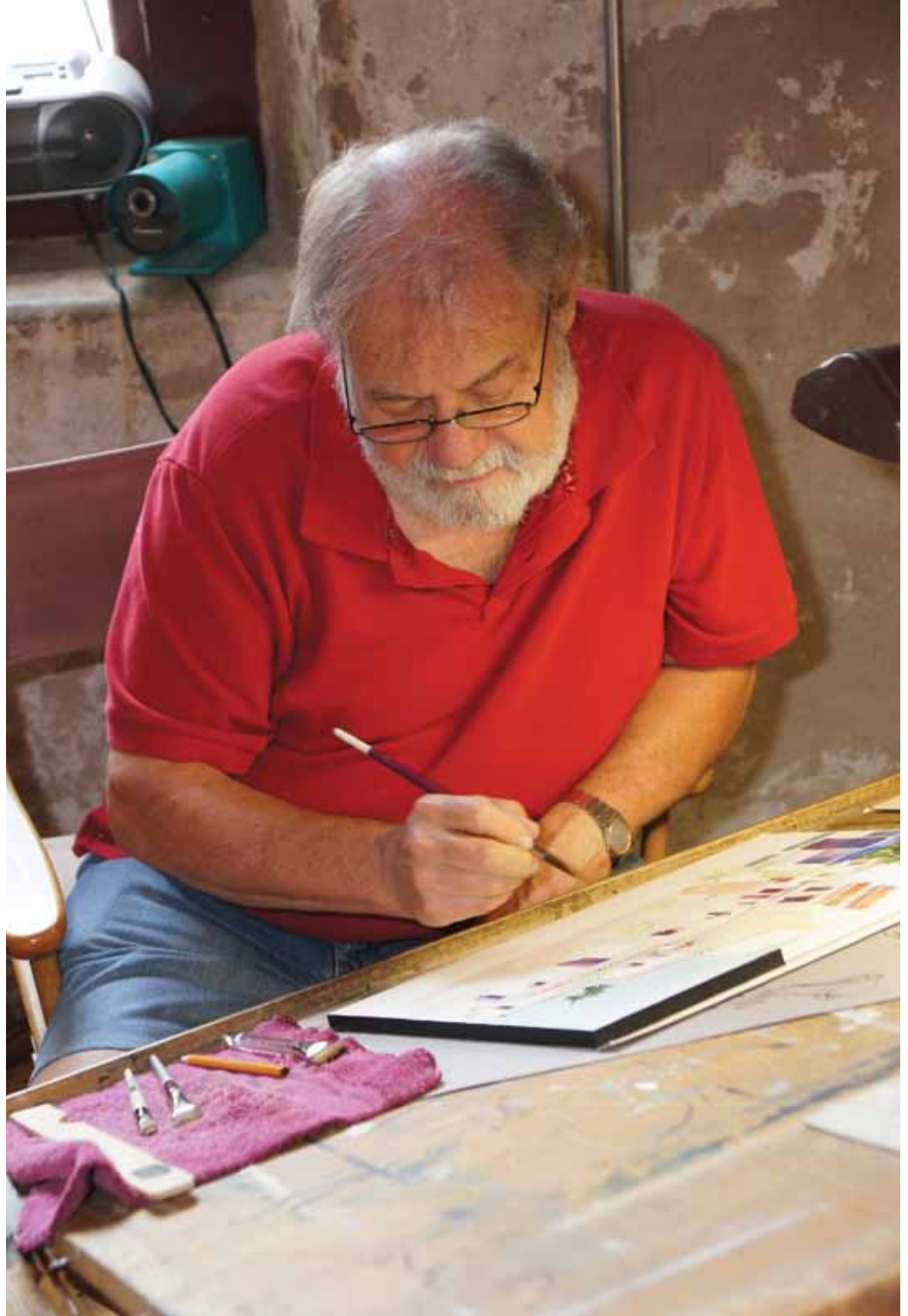
Feeling vs. Seeing

Further south, in the historic village of Alton, painter John Reid works on the second floor of the large Alton Mill Arts Centre, in a large room shared with another artist.

"The fellow artists at Alton Mill are very supportive of each other," he notes. "It's a very nice environment to be part of." While he's been at Alton Mill for one year, he's been painting full time for about six. He says he retired "long ago" from working as a commercial artist.

"The biggest difference between working as a commercial artist and painting now, is time," he says. "Commercial art is always working to a deadline. As well, the subject matter varies a great deal. Today painting and drawing is what I want to do, and the technique is totally different."

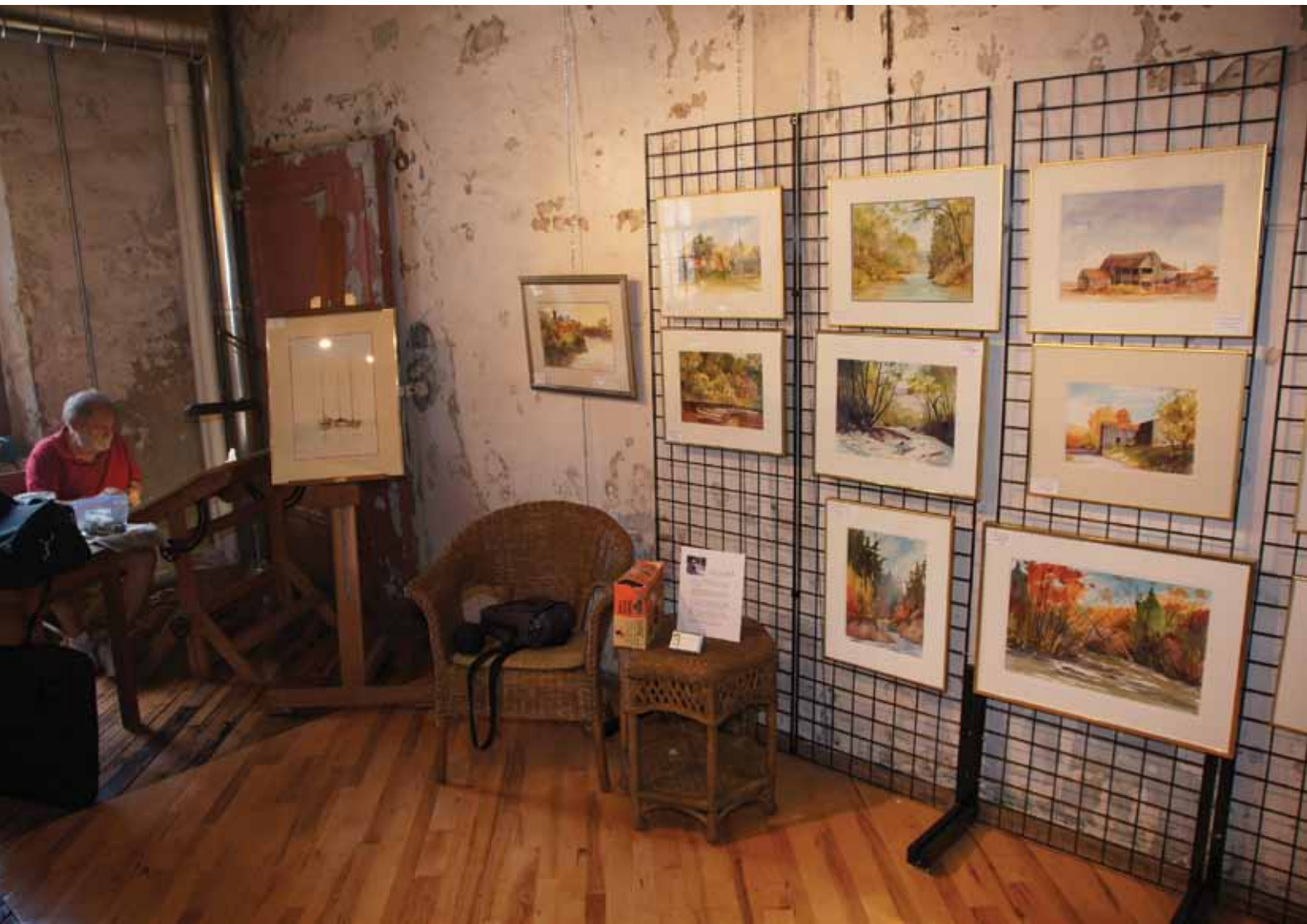
Reid enjoys working *en plein air*, or outside in the open, and finds it easy to make black and white



▲ John Reid painting a watercolour in his Alton Mill studio.

A work in progress and tools of the trade owned by John Reid. ►





▲ Finished works for sale adorn grid stands at the perimeter of John Reid's studio.

◀ Old Barns in Caledon prompt John Reid to capture them as vanishing landscapes.

Photo by John Reid



sketches. Then he may colour in with watercolours. He also paints from his own photographs from his travels and sketching holidays. He was planning to go to Manitoulin Island this past summer.

“Watercolour is a very challenging medium,” he adds, “but for me a rewarding one when I get it right. The transparency of colour is what makes it ‘sing.’ Pen and ink on the other hand, makes me really



▲ Treasure on the island. Jewellery, paintings, clothing, pottery and more fill the beachfront studio of Manitoulin's Ursula Hettmann.

Ursula Hettmann, an artist on Manitoulin Island, has a dedicated following who buys her unique jewellery to complement her original fashion designs. ►

look at something and see what it is I am drawing. With watercolour, it is a feeling I get when I look at something.”

Reid has a series of landscapes with old barns, which he likes to paint while they still exist. He calls this series “The Vanishing Landscape.”

The works in his studio range in price from \$350 to \$800 depending on size. He will take commissions for pet portraits and residential paintings. “Anything else is open for consideration.” You can reach Reid at 905 542 8911. He is usually at the Mill on weekends.

Island Inspiration

Ursula Hettmann, who was included in the Manitoulin Island feature in the Summer 2012 issue, has been building a new home and studio on the south shore of the island west of Spring Bay. Large windows look out on a dazzling sandy dune beach, matching the sparkle of her jewellery designs. In addition to creating silver jewellery complemented by amber, stones and pearls, she designs and creates clothing, and paints using acrylic in a watercolour style.

“People who visit my studio have been here before or are curious about this place in Dominion Bay,” she says. “There are ladies who come solely for an outfit and others to enhance their outfit with my jewellery.”

Hettmann has been in the art business since 1980, and is open from May to October. Her number is 705 377 4625. Like many other artists who work close to the Niagara Escarpment, she shows no sign of slowing down in the fulfilling work of translating inspiration into things of beauty that others can treasure. **EV**



