

# The Power of Artistic Expression

Our annual view of artists near the Niagara Escarpment

BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT  
PHOTOS BY MIKE DAVIS EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

**T**HE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT attracts artists almost as much as it does wildlife. Every year, it's our pleasure to meet a few artists and highlight their work and their galleries in our Autumn issue. This year we present some artists from Manitoulin Island, Glen Williams and Hamilton. ►

Ann Beam in front of her monumental work "In the Horse Washing Waterfall (after Hokusai)," 9 ft. x 12 ft., acrylic on panel with recycled corrugated paper, birch bark, cedar strips and photo transfer, 2011.











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◀ Seen from the side, the honest, simple elements of Ann Beam's "Horse Washing Waterfall" convey rugged energy.



◀ Photo transfer detail.



It's a powerful feeling to come upon an important work of art. Something about it resonates deeply. There may be a strong emotional response, sometimes awe, sometimes tears. It can be as if there's a sound coming from the work's silence. It calls out somehow, provokes a reaction. It can be from the exquisite beauty of something very small, very perfect. Sometimes size matters.

Ann Beam of M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island is fearless about scale. Some of her works are mighty. Her piece entitled "In the Horse Washing Waterfall (after Hokusai)" is jaw dropping. At 12 ft wide and nine ft high it dwarfs the viewer, transports you to its subject, that of a waterfall in full torrent. When you notice the figure washing a horse at the base of the falls, you sense the vastness portrayed.

Close examination of the materials used intensifies the experience. Truly multi-media, the work is made of strips of cardboard, birch bark, cedar. The choice of materials is exciting in the transformation of mundane things into the extraordinary. The three-dimensional quality of the materials convey great energy, more so than paint alone could.

Beam explains the evolution of this piece this way: "I had begun the big waterfall piece, but it was just seven ft wide by nine ft tall. I was in the art section of a bookstore in Ottawa, looking at Hokusai's work, researching his graphic portrayal of a fluid thing like water...which he did as a wood block print. He was good at it. I was comparing his expression of water with mine. I had analysed the patterns of falling water at Bridal Veil Falls myself. While I was doing all

this, I came across a work of Hokusai's titled 'At the Horse Washing Waterfall.' He had taken this famous Japanese story, of a general washing his horse in a waterfall, and he changed it into two peasants in loin cloths, washing a horse in a waterfall. As soon as I saw this work, I knew what I would do next! The excitement and buzz in me was huge. I would put my beautiful mare Mystery

and myself at the waterfall. I would be washing Mystery in 'At the Horse Washing Waterfall (after Hokusai)'. I expanded the seven ft by nine ft piece I had begun to a larger size, nine ft by 12 ft."

### Neon Raven Art Gallery

Beam owns and operates Neon Raven Art Gallery at her residence, which is a compound consisting of a house, studio

and gallery, all made of adobe. Why of adobe, is linked to Bean's interesting life. Originally from the U.S., she moved to Canada because of her opposition to the Vietnam war. She was already creating art when she met and married Carl Beam, an innovative artist who became the first of Native ancestry to have his work bought by the National Gallery of Canada as contemporary art.



► Beam holds a huge bowl made in the ancient Anasazi tradition: coil-built, with no base or foot, an unglazed underside, with geometric borders.





▲ Although a realistic landscape painter, Richard Edwards seems to be exploring abstraction in his series of reeds in water.



◀ Barbara Edwards' stained glass pieces are abstract or representational, but always glowing with light.

► Morgan Edwards uses strong colours and shapes in his abstracts.

They moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico where they learned the native ancient style of ceramics in the Anasazi tradition.

“It’s so sophisticated,” says Beam. “The art form just got us. The ceramic buzz would last for months. But one day Carl said to me Annie, our work is important for Canada. We returned to Canada, and when it came time for us to make our own home, we returned to Carl’s grandfather’s land on Manitoulin Island, in M’Chigeeng First Nation. We built our adobe house here, inspired by our stay in the southwest.”

The gallery carries the work of Ann, Carl and their daughter Anong, as well as some other Manitoulin artists.

“Whoever resonates with me, I’ll show in the gallery,” Beam says, “but the core of it is about the art of my family.”

Reach Ann Beam at 705 377 6088.

### **Edwards Art Studios**

In Kagawong in the north central part of Manitoulin Island, Edwards Art Studios has occupied an old mill on the waterfront for 19 years. With room for custom framing and productive workspace, it carries only original hand-crafted art.

While it includes the pieces of many artists, including potters and wood workers, it specializes in the creations of the Edwards family: Richard, Barbara and son Morgan.

Richard is a watercolour artist interested in local landscapes and the play of light on earth and water, frequently working outside, directly from nature. Also a printmaker, he offers limited editions of hand-pulled serigraphs. His recent close-ups of reeds in water suggest abstract patterns.

Barbara divides her time between weaving and working with glass. Studio windows are filled with stained glass pieces whose bright colours glow with the light. She is drawn to abstract work as well as representational explorations of birds, trees and flowers. She also creates fused glass dishes and glass jewellery, first making fused glass pendants and lamp work beads for her coloured wire work. Her hand woven shawls and pieces are made from alpaca, wool, silk or cotton.

Morgan’s recent paintings show a bold, confident use of colour and shape in abstract compositions. Once seen, his distinctive style is recognizable.

Contact the studios at 705 282 1919.





## Williams Mill

Williams Mill Visual Arts Centre in Glen Williams is a bit of a miracle. Previously the site of industrial buildings, the property was bought in 1985 by local residents Doug and Mary Lou Brock. The old buildings were restored and renovated and now form a complex dedicated to the arts and education. Approximately 30 artists have working studios here, that are open to the public on Friday and Saturday afternoons. Their work and that of others is for sale in the gallery shop or the glass-blowing building.

Sandra Krosse is a fibre artist who has been sewing professionally since she was 14 years old. While her ready-to-wear pieces range from size eight to 14, she does custom work for anyone.

"I bring the best out of what you are," she says. "Everybody has something beautiful about them." Custom work starts at \$1,000. While she does not do wedding dresses, she will do ball gowns, adding that "I assess the body and the lifestyle and the occasion."

Four years ago she created the "E-Scapelet," a variation of a shawl in many different

patterns and colours, that can dress up anything, and at \$225, has become a highly popular bestseller. Inspired by eastern and Asian fashions, it's a flattering form for any woman, Krosse believes.

"I'm all about flow and things that are easy to wear," she says.

Call Sandra Krosse at 905 877 5857.

## Glass Blowing Collective

The Williams' complex includes a glass-blowing studio/shop where the public can come inside and watch the artists work at one of the two "glory holes" where materials

are carefully transformed into an endless variety of colourful, delicate, gorgeous objects, some purely decorative, others also functional. There is room for only a limited number of members in the glass-blowing collective, so serious glass artists tend to remain a long time.

Williams Mill is at 905 873 8203.

► Part of the Williams Mill complex, the glass studio has room only for a few members. The public is encouraged to enter and watch the artists work in the dramatic hot shop.



▲ SK Designs is just off the Williams Mill gallery shop and features "art to wear," couturier clothing created by Sandra Krosse. Pieces can also be custom made.



▲ Sandra Krosse models her “E-Scapelet,” a uniquely structured piece that is part shawl, part cape, to transform anything from jeans to a simple cocktail dress into a flattering, dramatic ensemble.

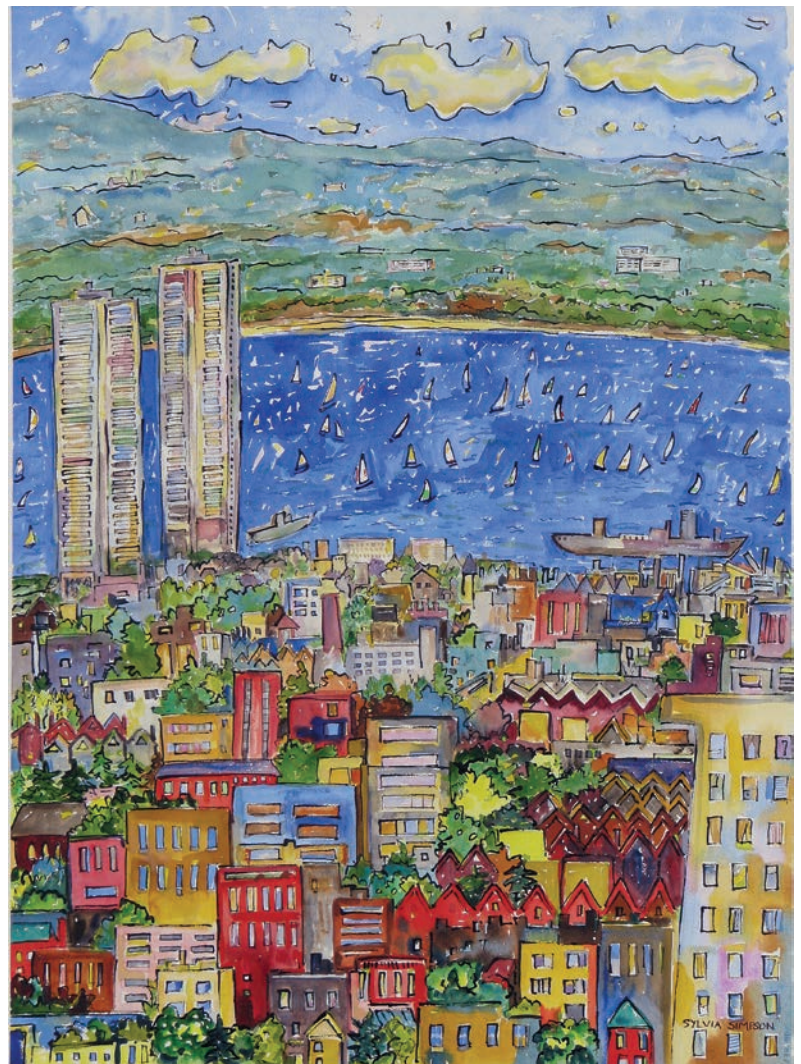
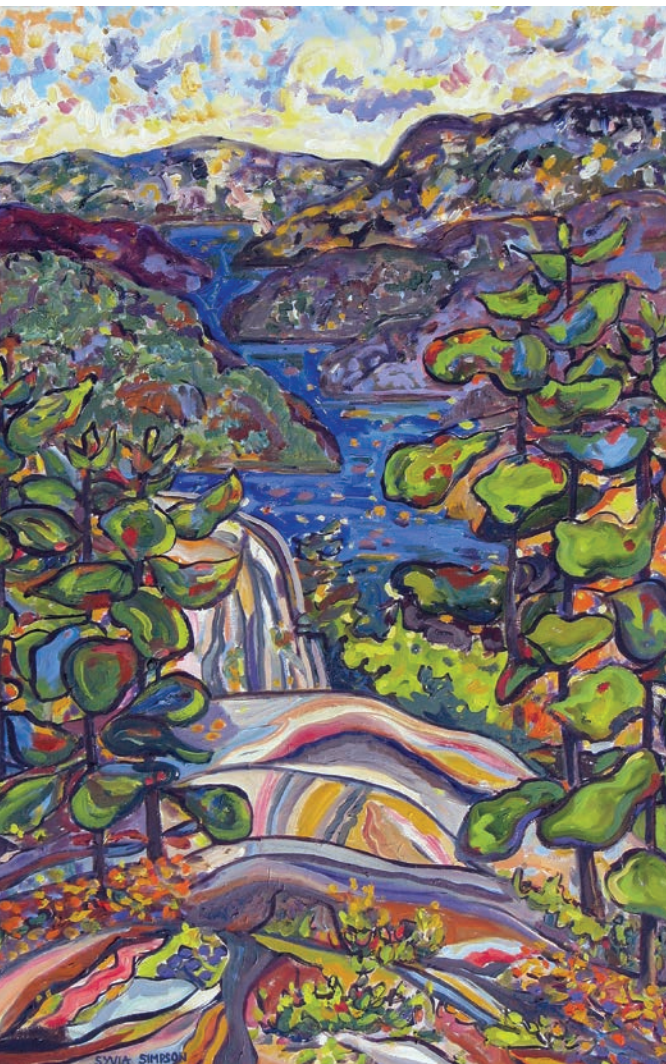




◀ The married team of Virginia Wilson Toccalino and Tony Toccalino perform a perfectly timed glass-blowing technique in the hot shop at the Williams Mill Glass Art Collective.

▼ (Bottom left) Sylvia Simpson's "Morning Light on Willisville Mountain," oil on canvas, is one of her La Cloche works. It was exhibited in an art show "that succeeded in stopping Vale Mining Company from mining/destroying this spiritual and treasured mountain," she reveals. PHOTO PROVIDED.

▼ (Bottom right) "Hamilton Harbour View" by Sylvia Simpson is watercolour and ink. She used India ink and a bamboo pen to make a thin random line. The green hills across the bay are part of the Niagara Escarpment. PHOTO PROVIDED.







▲ Beautiful pieces by glass artists of Glen Williams Glass. The tall curly vases and tiny perfume bottles were made by Tara Marsh.

### Creative Works

Sylvia Simpson has a charming studio-shop in Westdale, Hamilton. Her roots are deep in the Niagara Escarpment of the area, as she was born on “the mountain” as locals call it. She is also drawn to the northern edge of the Escarpment on Manitoulin Island, with its dramatic views of the La Cloche Mountains.

“The white mountains glowing against the bluest skies, and the dark water and endless green pines are spectacular,” she notes. “These unique mountains with their quartzite composition reflect the colours of pink, blue and gold in their white massive

shapes. From Hamilton’s Escarpment one can see for miles to Lake Ontario, the High Level Bridge, and the towers of Toronto. Daily drives in Hamilton wind up and down our Escarpment past cascading waterfalls in spring and frozen vertical rivers of ice in winter. Both locations, similar but so very different, give me a high viewpoint and a landscape stretching for miles.”

Simpson works in watercolour and oils and makes joyful use of colour and line. She will also take commissions to create portraits of houses.

Creative Works by Sylvia Simpson is at 905 517 7199. **NEV**