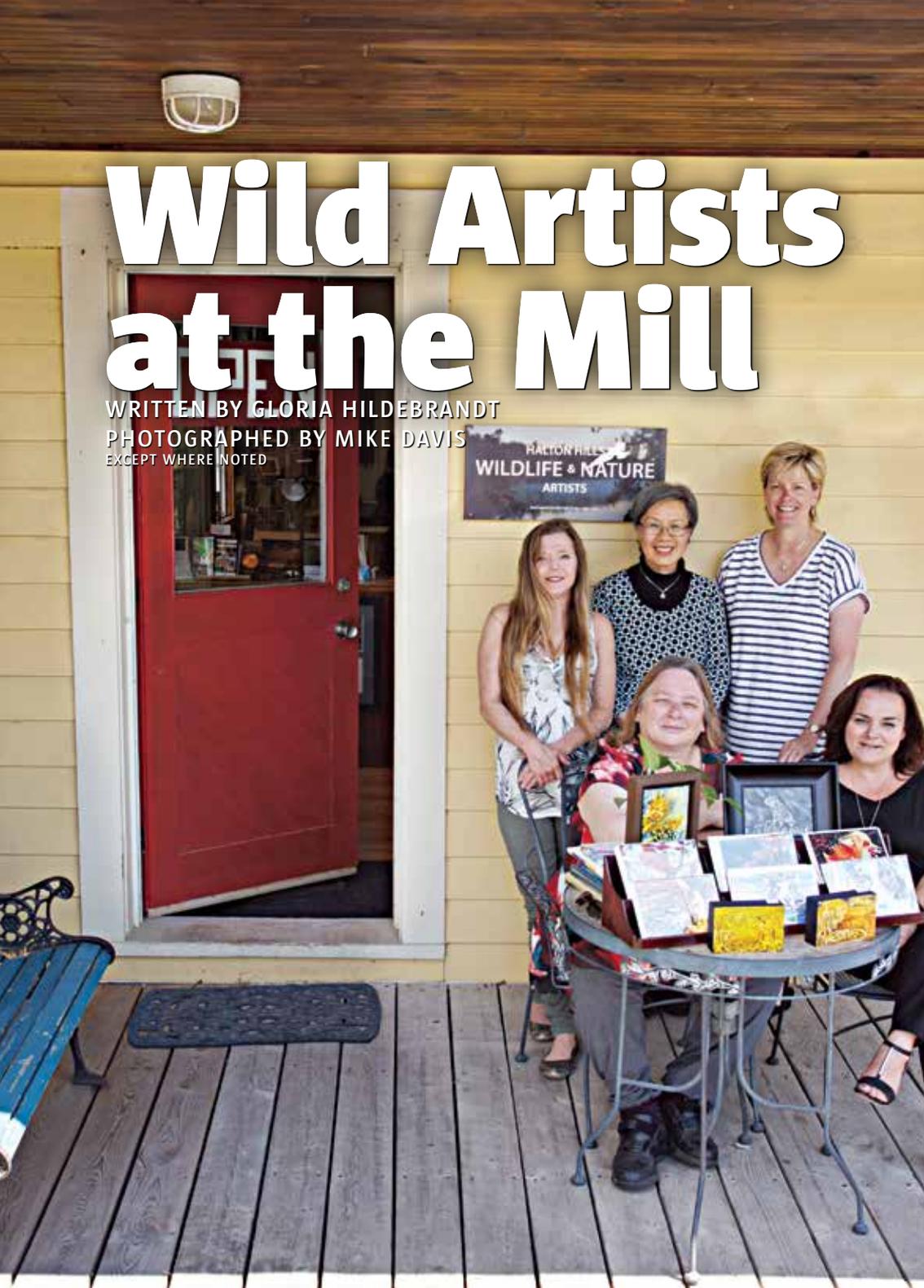


Wild Artists at the Mill

WRITTEN BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT
PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKE DAVIS
EXCEPT WHERE NOTED



Halton Hills Wildlife & Nature Artists is a group of five artists who separately were interested in animal subjects, and who came together less than two years ago to market their work.

Originally called Norval Wildlife & Nature Artists, in March they opened their gallery in Williams Mill Visual Arts Centre in Glen Williams and are pleased with their move.

“A lot more people visit here than in Norval,” one of them says. There are murmurs of agreement. “We don’t have to explain where we are,” says another. “We just say Williams Mill.” Louder agreement. They chat eagerly, quickly breaking into side conversations that makes following them difficult. They name the countries their recent visitors have come from: the States, Japan, Nunavut, all over the world actually, Malaysia.

“We have to be open Friday, Saturday and Sunday,” adds one of them. “Among five people, someone is always here.”

Four of the artists were students of the fifth, Kelly McNeil, “but we’re all at the same level now,” Kelly says quickly. “We’re similar in the types of art we do.”

Vicki McCracken speaks up from her far corner of the gallery. “Another thing in common is that Kelly and I have taken workshops with Robert Bateman.” A respectful silence follows for a moment but then their enthusiastic chatter resumes.

The gallery is narrow, the walls fully hung with paintings. Each artist has a small studio area to work in as well as display and sell work. A central aisle invites visitors to walk between the artists’ spaces. They are friendly and approachable, happy to answer questions and show each others’ pieces. The following pages have some of their works of art.



◀ “CRIMSON TIDE,” Wood Duck, oil, 14 x 14 inches
BY KELLY MCNEIL

Kelly is known for her realistic paintings of water. This is how she explains her technique: “I look at water as if I’m interpreting an abstract. I try not to dwell on what I am seeing, for example rocks under the water, as much as for example, slightly tan and pink blobs dancing around, surrounded by blue veins. I am always aware of the perspective of water, the soft edges, and the shapes that flow into one another. I also understand the rules of reflections. I don’t make it up. I take hundreds of photographs to get that one really interesting shot that I want to paint.”



▶ “LEGS,” Great Blue Herons, oil, 24 x 24 inches
BY KELLY MCNEIL

The background of this painting shows some heavy use of paint. Elaborating on that, Kelly says “I spent about 13 years taking outdoor watercolour classes with artist/instructor Barry Coombs. I used large sheets of hand-made Indian rag paper, that had lots of threads and bumps. My paintings had character before I even started. When I moved into my first studio and started to work in oils, I found a flat canvas boring. Before I start painting, but after I have done my drawing, I use gel mediums, applying them with a palette knife, to add my own character to the canvas.”

▶ “BOSTON MILLS – CALEDON,” oil on canvas, 18 x 36 inches
BY STELLA MARIN

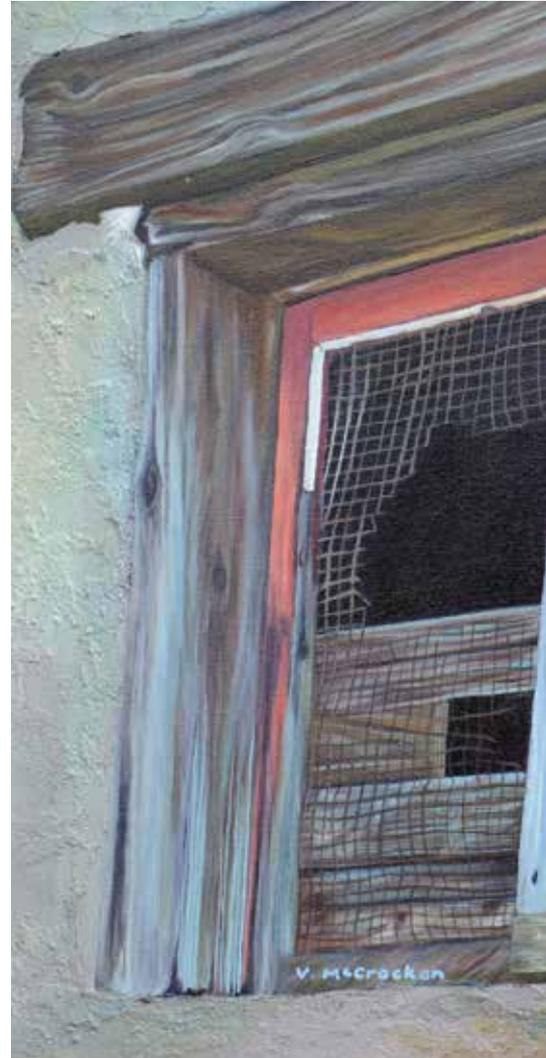
“I’m attracted by light and colour,” says Stella, “and the fall is my favourite season. I went out one morning to take fall pictures in the Caledon area and I came upon this barn with all the fall colours surrounding it. It took my breath away. I knew when I looked through the lens that I had to paint this.”
PHOTO PROVIDED.

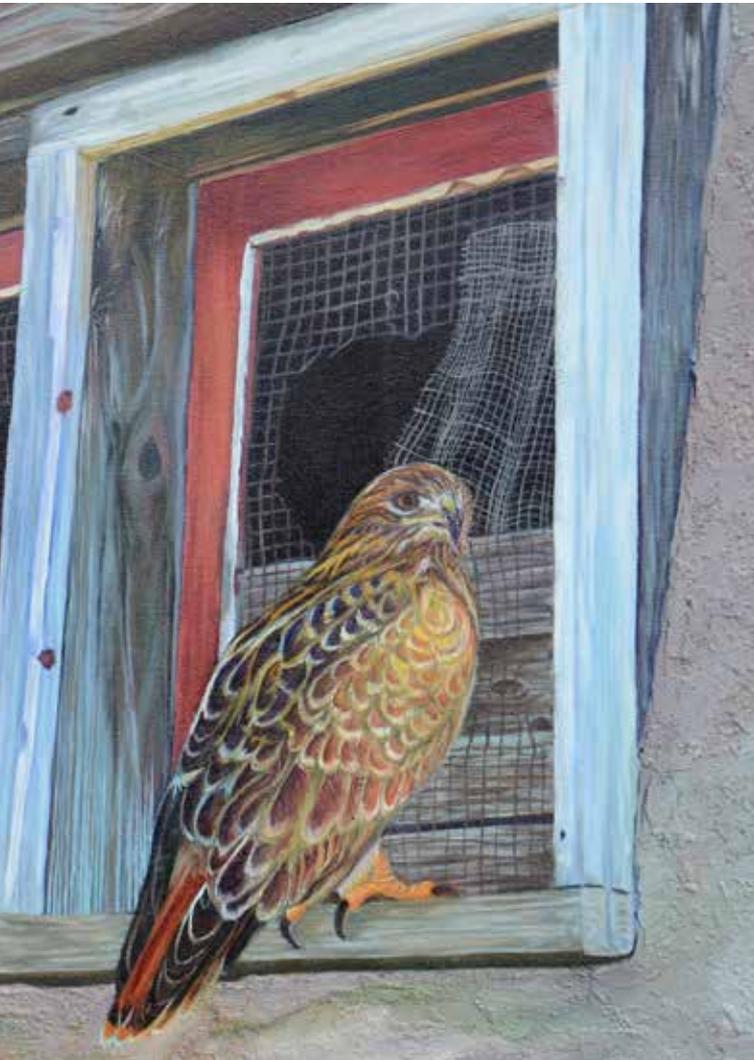


◀ Halton Hills Wildlife & Nature Artists are from left rear, Guylaine Leblanc, Milly Tseng, Vicki McCracken, and seated, Kelly McNeil and Stella Marin.



◀ “BEAUTY IN A BARN OWL,” photo on canvas, 16 x 20 inches BY VICKI MCCRACKEN
“The Barn Owl was taken on a photo shoot at Mountsberg Conservation Area,” notes Vicki. “This is a great place to see birds up close and personal. Using many of my photos as references for paintings, I sometimes decide that the photo would be best suited for photo on canvas. I find that the images I choose to paint usually have more vibrant colours and visible patterns.”





▲ “HAWK’S HAUNT,” oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches
BY VICKI MCCRACKEN

“I work mainly from my photos and oil is my chosen medium. Some photos I get while on photo shoots. Finding the window for ‘Hawk’s Haunt’ was not an easy task but I knew what I was looking for. I wanted one that had colour and texture. I drove around in my car and when I spotted a barn that I thought had possibility, I pulled up to the house, knocked on the door, and asked permission to photograph. Wanting to add a bird sitting on the ledge of the window, I used my photos from Mountsberg as a guide to paint the hawk in the right position for the painting.”

◀ “NORVAL’S CANADA GEESE,” acrylic, 36 x 12 inches
BY GUYLAINE LEBLANC

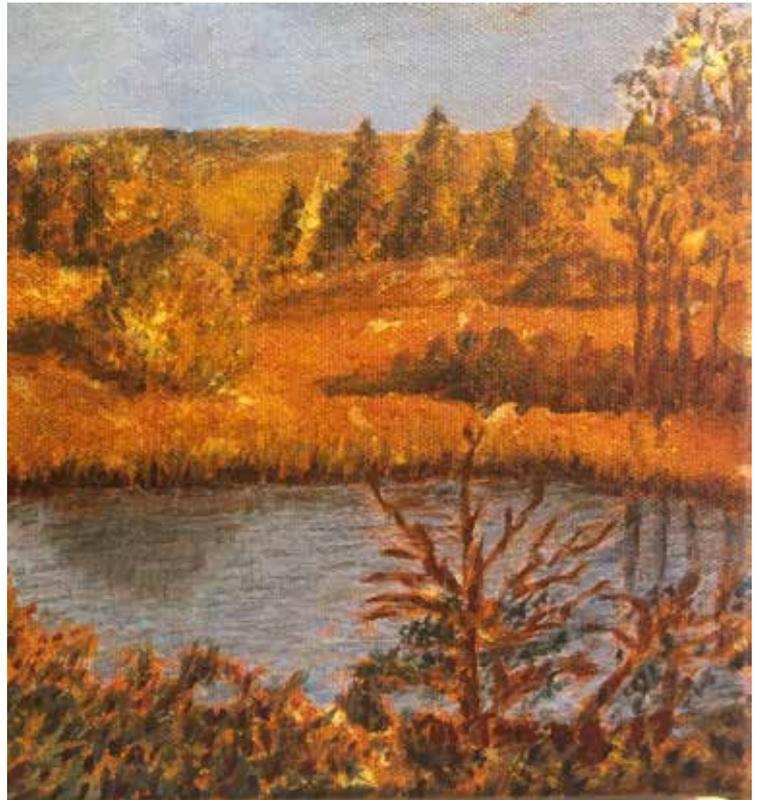
“This is from a picture I took at the Credit River and I was waiting for the perfect moment when the geese passed in front of the orange branches,” says Guylaine. “The colour was amazing.”





▲ "AUTUMN SKY," acrylics, 12 x 12 inches
BY MILLY TSENG

Milly uses the technique of "negative painting" for her work. "Negative painting is painting outside the image or object," she explains. "After preparing the background, I outline the subject and paint the empty spaces creating an illusion of depth/contrast. In both my paintings I have applied a negative painting style. Note the foreground in "Along the Way" and for the whole painting "Autumn Sky," this style was applied."



▲ "ALONG THE WAY," acrylics, 10 x 8 inches
BY MILLY TSENG

People familiar with the central Niagara Escarpment area might recognize at one glance that this is a scene from Forks of the Credit Provincial Park, with its distinctive kettle lake.
ABOVE & LEFT, PHOTOS PROVIDED.





▲ “LIKE MY TAIL,” oil on canvas, 8 x 8 inches

BY STELLA MARIN

“This is from a photograph by Brian King, a wonderful wildlife photographer,” Stella says. “I had to ask if I could paint it. Composition is so important. I look for lighting, the mood of the light and the character of the photo, the story it tells. This image had complete character with the way he was looking out at us thinking ‘Yes, I know I look good.’ Hence the title of my painting. It has also won second place in the Buckhorn Arts Festival, August 2015.”

PHOTO PROVIDED.

◀ “THE LANDING,”

acrylic, 36 x 24 inches

BY GUYLAINE LEBLANC

“A friend of mine gave me this photo,” notes Guylaine. “When I saw the wings, I was amazed by the movement and had to recreate it.”

*Halton Hills Wildlife &
Nature Artists share a studio
at Williams Mill Visual Arts
Centre in Glen Williams. NEV*