

# Tangled Mysteries

BY DUANE NICKERSON

**A**s an artist who has been living beside the Escarpment for 15 years, I spend much of my time walking the Bruce Trail between Grimsby and Hamilton. I am drawn to the enormous visual complexity of the old stone, the mature trees and the moss and fungus that keeps the cycle of life, death and rebirth in motion.

Spring on the Bruce trail between Grimsby and Stoney Creek. A wonderful time to study the structures of the trail using my watercolours, probing for composition possibilities that can be worked up in the studio.



▲ “Albion Falls.” Late October afternoon moment beside the gentle murmur of Albion Falls. In fall, the flow of water over the stepped layers of limestone slows to reveal the texture of the ancient surface. OIL ON LINEN, 42 X 52 INCHES, 2017

**M**y practice as an artist has always been centred on the belief that an artwork can conjure up new meaning in the present, very much like a piece of music or a reflective moment in a silent forest. I see the Niagara Escarpment as a very old geological formation that retains a sense of the mystery of deep time that extends beyond human culture. For 15 years now, the source of my conjuring has been the land, specifically, the trees and textures offered up by the Niagara Escarpment.

I am a Canadian artist who has exhibited my work in galleries from Singapore to Toronto, and my work resides in prominent collections around the world, from Korea to New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada. I am the recipient of a Governor General’s Gold Medal award and numerous Ontario Arts Council exhibition grants.

In what could be called my “emerged state” as an artist, I continue to probe the potential of oil painting as a medium for expression. As a graduate student studying fine art at the University of

Calgary in the early 1990s, my focus was on language and using a wide range of materials to support the theories behind my work.

#### **Beyond Language**

When I finished grad school and established my own studio in Toronto, I quickly discovered that viewers and patrons were more interested in the visual dynamics of my work and less interested in the language with which it was described. I now believe that images, particularly paintings, can generate meaning that is not of language.

In addition to leaving behind graduate school art theory, I also delved into the craft of painting. Engaging with oil paint is like picking up a violin; you soon realize that there is a serious investment in learning required to master the medium. I feel that my work has now matured and my studio practice has a slow rhythm, but I am productive enough to regularly hold solo exhibitions.

My most recent solo exhibitions in 2019 featured almost exclusively trees that seem to float untethered from the ground. I associate my



▲ “Monument.” An old cedar stump remains long after the tree is gone. A monument to perpetual transformation. Subtle colours of green and brown illuminate the dance of organisms bringing new life from an old form. OIL ON CANVAS, 52 X 40 INCHES, 2020



◀ “Witch.” A wild tangle of roots that once fed a majestic maple tree. The steep slope of the Escarpment combined with the ever-moving layers of limestone leads to premature collapse. The labyrinth of lines draws me in to thoughts of mystery and magic power. OIL ON CANVAS, 36 X 48 INCHES, 2020



▲ "Night." A group of cedar trees planted in memory of a loved one suggest in their shape eternal sorrow. In the light of the moon, eternity comes alive. OIL ON CANVAS, 44 X 54 INCHES, 2018

current paintings to the long tradition of landscape painting in Western art. I admire those artists who had a special attraction to the beautiful forms of trees, and who took the time to work up the layers of paint to capture the subtlety of light on natural forms.

Artists like Ruisdael, Corot, Church and some of Canada's earlier painters such as Vernet and O'Brien all demonstrated an engagement

with complex forms and surfaces that, to me, attests to a profound love of the visual dynamics that the natural world presents. Of course, they were also masters of their craft – they understood paint and composition.

#### Revealing Process

People often ask why I leave the bottom of the paintings unresolved. I feel the need to reveal the process of painting

in my work, to maintain the tension between the delicate illusion of a tree and the coarse reality of coloured, viscous substances on a canvas surface. This tension for me suggests a balance between coherence and chaos, between substance and emptiness. I guess this is my visual metaphor for life, something that requires a complex balance of forces and is therefore fragile.

My current studio work involves the continued exploration of the forms of trees. Two of my recent works feature up-ended tree stumps on a dark background. These are beautiful forms that appear all along the Escarpment trails and conjure thoughts of tangled mysteries, of complex paths of cellular growth that moved into the soil and through cracks in the limestone that



◀ "Pine Sky." A mature pine tree alone on a carefully mowed field. A hot August afternoon with wisps of clouds slowly undulating in an electric sky. OIL ON CANVAS, 34 X 26 INCHES, 2018



▲ "Lost Oak, Morning." A lone towering oak has lost its vigor after decades as a sentinel for cows seeking shade. The farm also looks deserted, the barn frail and shedding its shingles along with the once mighty oak. OIL ON LINEN, 46 X 54 INCHES, 2018

We got your attention.



Now let's get theirs.

ads@NEViews.ca  
905.866.7888

**WISE CRACKS**

Foundation Crack Specialists  
Stop Leaks from the Inside!

Interior Drainage Without  
Excavation

Window Wells, Covers and  
Drain Systems

Supply/Install/Maintain  
Sump Pump Systems

Ask about our Lifetime  
Warranty

We give a hoot!



1-855-947-2725  
info@wisecrackscentral.com

Tired? Bored?

You need more  
Foodstuffs  
in your life!



**FOODSTUFFS**  
Specialty • Bulk • Health

89 Main Street South  
Downtown Georgetown  
905.877.6569

Foodstuffs.ca  
Foodstuffs\_Inc  
Foodstuffs.Georgetown

► "Dusk." A tall maple towers over a well-tended Niagara orchard at the end of day. A strong central trunk suggests a past crowded with competitors for light.  
OIL ON LINEN, 40 X 20 INCHES, 2018



makes up the Escarpment ridges. These are forms that draw me in and speak of time, growth and decay.

The painting process is time consuming. I begin a composition with an encounter, a visual experience that makes me pause. During my walks I capture these many encounters with a camera and then return with my watercolours and study more closely the forms that caught my attention. The process of sketching the image allows me to discover the visual structure of the image through careful observation. Once I find this structure, I know I am ready to proceed to work up the image as a studio painting. It usually takes between two and four months for me to complete a work; some take longer. Sometimes the structure never materializes, and I abandon the project after the sketch.

My work is represented by Gallery on the Bay in Hamilton, Abbozzo Gallery in Toronto, and is available online at artsy.net. **NEV**



◀ "Heaven." A summer day on the banks of the Elora Gorge. A centuries old cedar tree clings to stone, yet appears to defy gravity. If time were sky, this tree would float in the clouds. OIL ON LINEN, 36 X 28 INCHES, 2018



◀ "Lost Pine." The shell of an ancient pine tree clings to the earth. I am humbled by the endurance, of so many seasons of heat and cold. PASTEL AND WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER, 21 X 28 INCHES, 2019



**NDP**  
**SCOTT DUVALL**  
Proud to serve  
**Hamilton Mountain**

Constituency Office:  
555 Concession Street, Unit 2 (Level 2)  
Hamilton, Ontario L8V 1A8

Member of Parliament  
✉ Scott.Duvall@parl.gc.ca | 📞 905-574-3331

## Thank You!



Ranked "Highest in Investor Satisfaction with Full-Service Brokerage Firms," 8 Years in a Row.

<p><b>Archie Braga, CFP®</b> Financial Advisor (519) 853-4694 315 Queen St. E., Unit #2 Acton, ON L7J 1R1 archie.braga@edwardjones.com</p>	<p><b>George Paolucci</b> Financial Advisor (519) 833-9069 82 Main Street Erin, ON N0B 1T0 george.paolucci@edwardjones.com</p>
<p><b>Nicole Brookes</b> Financial Advisor (905) 873-7630 211 Guelph St., Unit 4 Georgetown, ON L7G 5B5 nicole.brookes@edwardjones.com</p>	<p><b>Joel Sinke</b> Financial Advisor (905) 648-3870 385 Wilson St. E., Ste. 203 Ancaster, ON L9G 2C1 joel.sinke@edwardjones.com</p>

**Todd Neff, CFP®**  
Financial Advisor  
(905) 331-1099  
1500 Upper Middle Rd., Unit 6  
Burlington, ON L7P 3P5  
todd.neff@edwardjones.com

For J.D. Power 2020 award information, visit [jdpower.com/awards](http://jdpower.com/awards).

**Edward Jones**



**JUDY MARSALES REAL ESTATE LTD. Brokerage**

Westdale 905-522-3300      Locke 905-529-3300      Ancaster 905-648-6800

**OUR KNOWLEDGE IS YOUR POWER!  
CALL US FOR ALL YOUR REAL ESTATE NEEDS!**