

Artist intends to create peace through painting



Artist Shelley Beach stands in front of her latest collection of paintings on display at the Art Gallery of Bancroft. Titled Sanctuary the exhibit runs until July 27.

Nate Smelle Staff

By Nate Smelle

Haliburton artist Shelley Beach was in Bancroft on Friday, July 4 to officially open her latest exhibition, Sanctuary, at the Art Gallery of Bancroft. The show is on display until July 27, and features a collection of 25 paintings inspired by the artist's affinity with the natural world.

"I would have to say that my biggest inspiration is from nature, and from living in this very special place," said Beach.

"The title of this show, Sanctuary, really spells it out. It's a sacred or special place where you feel safe, protected and at peace."

Living on Kennis Lake in the Haliburton Highlands, Beach said it is easy to become inspired while surrounded by natural beauty. Beach credits the time she spent as a child at her family cottage on Baptiste Lake near Bancroft as a big part of the reason she holds such a deep appreciation for nature. Although inspired by the reality of the natural world she does not intend to replicate a scene through her art. Instead, Beach prefers to let her imagination take charge.

"My real work taps into my imagination and goes from there," she said.

"I love to be inspired by nature, then paint, and then let the painting take me somewhere that is completely unexpected to me. It's the kind of creative journey that really excites me. Some of my best work has been totally spontaneous, not planned or controlled."

Beach's work ranges from traditional watercolour to experimental mixed-media and monotype. She enjoys working with watercolours, she said, because of the unexpected beauty they can produce.

"The magic of using fluid, water-based mediums provides a means of expressing a sense of harmony with my environment," said Beach.

"Working intuitively, I discover connections and establish an identity through my sense of place. Patterns and symbols emerge to convey my profound affinity to these life forces."

Her paintings hang in numerous corporate and private collections around the world. Notably Beach's work can be found in the collections of the previous Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Hilary M. Weston, and the collection of the Veridian Corporation. She is a signature member of the Toronto Watercolour Society, an elected member of the Society of Canadian Artists and is represented by the Ethel Curry Gallery in Haliburton.

Beach also expresses her passion for the arts through teaching. For the last five years she has taught classes in painting with watercolours and acrylics at the Fleming College School of the Arts in Haliburton.

"I find that a lot of my students are working to loosen up, and it is not easy for every personality," Beach said.

?There is a balancing act between letting go and having control. If you are lucky you can walk that line and something works out. You have to be willing to take a risk and go into that territory where you are unsure of how it will work out.?

Before pursuing a formal education in the arts herself, Beach waited until her children had finished university. In 2004 she graduated with honours from the Ontario College of Art and Design. Although she was already an accomplished artist at the time, Beach said she wanted to continue expanding her knowledge and refining her skills.

?If you ever think you have stopped learning you might as well pack it in,? she said.

The Art Gallery of Bancroft will be home to Beach's Sanctuary until July 27. For more information visit www.artgallerybancroft.ca, or, www.theshelleybeach.com .