

Artist to Collect

Kari Duke





previous page, Winter Beauty, oil on canvas, 36"x48", 2013



Ochre Evening, oil on canvas, 24"x36", 2012

above, Summer's Last Days, oil on canvas, 48"x48", 2013

Back Alley Beauty

written by Kylie Serebrin

The art of Kari Duke illustrates one very important lesson: inspiration and beauty really can be found in our own backyards – or at least in our back alleyways.

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota to Norwegian parents, Kari's family subsequently settled in Edmonton, Alberta for her elementary and high school years. She points out that her parents were always extremely supportive of her, especially in terms of her artistic interests. "My father wanted to become an artist, himself, as a child in Norway, but circumstances made it impossible

to do so," she notes. "As I was growing up, he always encouraged me to draw and paint, and to this day I feel very fortunate to make a living out of something he had always wanted to do." Kari also spent a childhood summer painting in Norway with Jon Lindheim, a personal friend of her father and a very successful Norwegian artist. "Jon was very generous with his time and efforts," she recalls, "he allowed me to paint alongside him and I learned a great deal."

Always dabbling in art as a hobby, Kari graduated from The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, after which she became a secretary in the oil industry. Later, she married and moved to Hope, British Columbia, where she brought up her family and worked in the school system. "We spent 25 years in Hope, where I had a good job, many wonderful friends, enjoyed a large home



The Day's End, oil on canvas, 30"x60", 2012



above, Gentle Sunset, oil on canvas, 30"x60", 2012



bottom, An Early Evening Walk, oil on canvas, 48"x60", 2012

with a stunning view of Mount Hope from my kitchen window and where I relished the privacy and constant beauty of the region," Kari remarks. There, she often painted the lush gardens and gorgeous mountain scenery that surrounded her home. After two and a half decades of being spoiled by the splendor of Hope, however, Kari and her husband relocated to Edmonton where he could specialize in geriatric medicine.

The Light at the End of the Alley

This turn of events resulted in Kari living in a tiny house with no privacy, missing her friends, her job – her entire identity, really. "To say that I was depressed would be an understatement. I was frightened, insecure and lonely. It was January, minus 30 degrees, and everything was covered in

luck), Kari had uncovered something truly beautiful within something she had previously found rather ugly. Overcome by a new appreciation for the urban landscape she had been thrust into, she set to work photographing and painting it. "I remember stopping to capture a few pictures of a neighbour's laundry hanging on a line. As I was snapping photographs, the owner of the house waved at me and asked me what I was doing. I explained and she said, 'Oh for heaven's sake! I will put some more colourful laundry on the line for you! I have something pink... how about blue?' After rearranging her laundry, my neighbour invited me in for coffee and soon became one of my best friends. I've painted her laundry and garden many, many times since that day," Kari reminisces.



Winter Afternoon, oil on canvas, 24"x60", 2013

snow. When I took walks in the neighbourhood, I felt claustrophobic and sad. I certainly couldn't identify anything I wanted to paint. I was generally living in a 'funk'," she recalls. Then, one day, when she and her dog were out for a stroll around the alleyways and side streets of her community, Kari noticed a bright stream of sun hitting the beat-up old garbage cans, zigzagging fences, garage doors and telephone poles. For the first time, she recognized real beauty in what she was seeing. Instead of complaining and finding fault, Kari finally found inspiration – and she decided to try to capture it.

With the eye of an artist (and a touch of sheer

Symbols of a Gentler Time

Her art became a practice in documenting Edmonton's post-war neighbourhoods – a celebration of the back alley, the city's rich history and the romance and nostalgia evoked when the two ideas are superimposed. Kari's paintings are symbolic of a gentler time. One that was safe, conducive to socially interactive neighbours and in which children were encouraged to play outside, learning and discovering with their peers.

"There is such beauty in the inconsistencies of the aging alley – nothing is straight, it is a natural setting where the poles are leaning and Mother Nature and time have had a say in how everything



Evening Sun, oil on canvas, 24"x48", 2013



above, Ochre Evening, oil on canvas, 24"x36", 2012
 right top, Winter Tree, oil on canvas, 48"x48", 2011
 right bottom, Alley Vista, oil on canvas, 12"x60", 2012

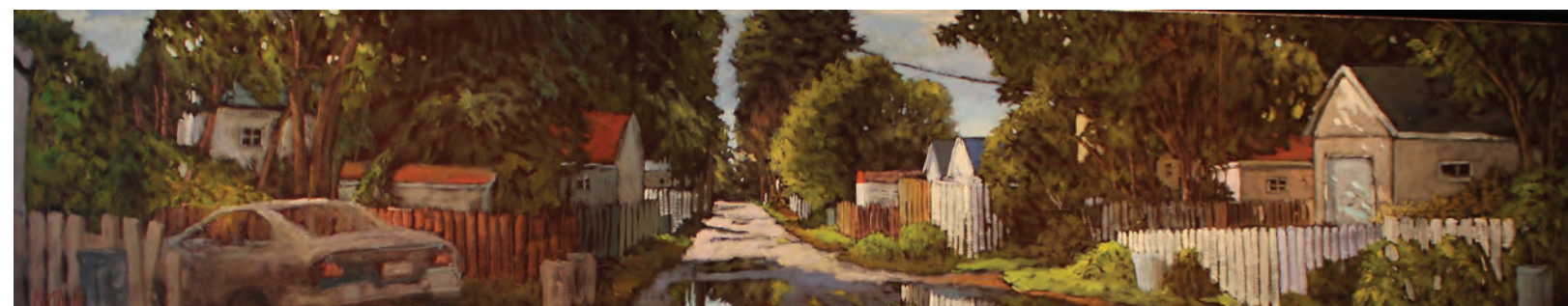
appears. The post-war alleys I paint lack the sterile appearance of our newer neighbourhoods. Their simple timeworn and commonplace qualities are what make them so inspiring," Kari states.

She is often stirred by the play of sunlight and shadows. Kari especially enjoys capturing the winter and early spring seasons, when the trees are naked, without the refinement of their leaves. "Their form is beautiful during these months. They move with such grace as the wind plays with the lights and shade, casting shapes on the buildings that surround them," she notes. "I also find the reflections in puddles after a heavy rain to be an exciting subject matter. The types of effects are what draw me in, time and time again." Kari's resulting paintings are fresh, dynamic and colourful, capturing the charm of an earlier era that speaks not only to Albertans, but to city dwellers all across North America. By portraying a subject matter that is typically overlooked by many, Kari inspires us to take pause and consider the beauty that exists right on our very own doorsteps.

Painting the White Away

Kari's artistic process begins with explorations of her neighbourhood, during which she captures resource photographs of interesting views. Her paintings typically correlate to one photographic image, or a small grouping of 3-4 images blended together. Choosing the right subject is a matter of introspection. "I sit and consider why I'm inspired to paint a particular image," she explains, "and I don't move forward with a painting until I make certain decisions regarding my desired focal point, etc." Next, Kari determines the appropriate size of her canvas and whether her subject would be better served by a horizontal or vertical composition. Once this has been decided, it's time for her painting surface to be prepared.

"In all honesty, I'm terrified of white," Kari reveals. "I have to cover my board or canvas, usually with a dark brown gesso or a warm umber." Next, she sketches with a pink or coral watercolor pencil, which shows up brightly on the dark gesso. Sometimes these sketches are incredibly detailed, while other





August Afternoon, oil on canvas, 24"x60", 2012

times they simply map in where she wants the main buildings, in order to confirm that her perspective is correct. Then, she turns on her music, lays out her palette, turns her phone on silent, switches on the lights and settles in to work for 6-8 hours.

Kari paints with water-mixable paint, even though she never mixes them with water while she's painting. "I've been using this product for 15 years and I wouldn't use anything else. They have the same qualities as regular oils in every respect, except they don't smell of turpentine or oil. Plus, my brushes clean up easily with warm soap and water," she explains. Kari refers to herself as a 'negative painter' because when she starts applying paint to canvas, she gravitates towards shapes such as the sky. She then leaves the dark brown gesso showing through where she wants a figure, like a tree or a roofline, to appear.

When Kari is happy with her day's work, she takes the painting off her easel and puts it on her drying rack for a few days – during which time she attends to the 2 or 3 other paintings-in-progress that she's creating simultaneously. Working on other paintings for a couple of days allows Kari to return to each work with fresh eyes before she embarks upon reworking it. At this point, the painting is dry to the touch and she is able to 'pop-up' the colours, add some drama and remove any elements that displease her. When she's satisfied with a final result, Kari signs her painting, lets it dry completely and varnishes it.

Artistically-Spirited and Business-Minded

Kari sends finished paintings to her gallery representatives, diligently and regularly. She describes her current galleries as wonderful, honest

and hard working – all of which she demands, since she expects them to work conscientiously on her behalf. In exchange, Kari honours her equal obligation to provide them with fresh artwork. She points out, "I've worked in a gallery, so I know that it's a difficult job. Thus, I try my best to send work whenever it is requested and I really listen to the gallery owners. They know their clientele, so when they suggest a size or subject matter that someone is searching for, I try to create it for them so that their clients will be pleased."

Kari paints from her heart, yet she is business-minded. "An artist who is painting professionally requires a different mindset from a hobbyist who paints for stress relief or to fill his or her leisure time. Let's face it – unless a full-time artist is lucky enough to have someone financially supporting the journey, art supplies are very expensive. So

you need a bit of a game plan," she states. For Kari, this means taking the marketing aspect of her career seriously – finding out where the market is for her subject matter, investigating prospective galleries carefully and determining which businesses will best promote her type of art.

In the name of creative research, Kari often spends Saturdays dropping into her Edmonton representative, The Front Gallery, to chat about art trends and ideas with people who wander in off the street to enjoy the gallery's shows. Fellow artists at The Front Gallery have been an invaluable professional support system for Kari, as well. "Many of them have made themselves available to help me out when I've needed another artist's suggestions," she acknowledges. "Knowing that I have colleagues nearby who will thoughtfully critique my work is a wonderful privilege."



Kari Duke



McKernon Laundry, oil on canvas, 12"x12", 2011



above, May Lilacs, oil on canvas, 24"x48", 2013

below, Late Summer, oil on canvas, 24"x48", 2012

Preserving a Disappearing Way-of-Life

Kari feels incredibly lucky to have everything she needs to create her art right in her own neighbourhood. A place where she once felt exiled, downtown Edmonton has become a nurturing and inspiring place that she now loves and feels strongly connected to. "I feel at home among the many wonderful post-war homes, with their detached garages and leaning fences. These are the back alleys where children used to play, where they called on their friends and walked home from school. They are the alleys in which grown-ups talked over their fences. Everyone knew everyone else's dog, and even what everyone received for Christmas, because you could see the packages in their garbage cans!" Kari describes. "These days, people often go in and out of their homes and no one even speaks to each other. That's why I like to think I'm capturing a piece of history with my art. These old neighbourhoods are disappearing and I feel a responsibility to keep their memory alive."

From her little house in Edmonton, with its own run-down garage, fence in need of repair, antiquated plumbing and rutted back alleyway, Kari Duke truly paints what she knows – and she's never been happier.

To share in Kari Duke's urban nostalgia, contact her via email at kariduke50@gmail.com, or by telephone at 780.435.7172.

For a gallery representative, please contact:



KARI DUKE

ARTIST SHOWCASE

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KARI DUKE

ARTIST SHOWCASE

*This Page, below, **March Melt in McKernan**, diptych, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"*

*Following Page, top, **Such a Fine Day**, oil on canvas, 24" x 48"*

*Following Page, bottom, **Park Allen Alley, Spring**, oil on canvas, 30" x 48"*







This Page, above, **Garneau Spring Reflections**, oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

Previous Page, above, **Wire Fence**, oil on canvas, 30" x 48"

Previous Page, bottom, **Midsummer Stroll**, oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

Kari began painting at an early age, and had the opportunity to learn from Jon Lindheim, a celebrated Norwegian artist on one of her many visits to Norway with her family. From then on, Kari continued to hone her skills until she decided in 2000 to make painting her full time career. Having been brought up in Edmonton, Kari took alleys (her prominent subject matter) and the prairie landscape for granted. In the late 70's Kari moved to Hope, BC to start her family, and resumed her art whenever she had the chance.

In 1999, Kari and her family moved back to Edmonton, and it was then, after so many years away, that Kari truly appreciated the beauty and significance of Alberta back alleys and neighborhoods. It was then that Kari found her niche and spent the next 20 years painting full time, wandering Edmonton's beloved neighborhoods and alleys for inspiration.

Kari moved to Ottawa to be close to her daughter and family, and found herself excited to try new subject matter.





This Page, above, **Summer Showers**, oil on canvas, 30" x 48"

This Page, right, **August Rain**, oil on canvas, 24" x 18"

Following Page, **Puddle Jumping**, oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

Eastern Canada proved a stark contrast to Alberta, but provided a new and daunting challenge. With change comes growth, and Kari went out of her comfort zone to capture unfamiliar and exciting scenes.

Kari's uses water soluble oil paint on dark gessoed canvas, and works in her home studio. She still paints Alberta scenes for Avens Gallery in Canmore, and enjoys this familiar and cozy scenery, like seeing an old friend. In Ottawa she is able to capture the unique beauty of street and backyard scenes for the Koyman Galleries.

Kari feels incredibly blessed to have been able to paint the scenery she has, challenging herself and pushing to continuously grow, both as an artist but as a human being, and is forever grateful that she is able to pursue her passions every day.



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