



a beautiful Obsession

Cornwall's art scene is being led by a variety of talented people, excelling in music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts.

A group of artists at Serenity Studio are turning heads with paintings that have one thing in common—the ability to evoke emotion.

MiSun
Kim-Hunter

The colourful displays in large front windows offer a tantalizing hint of what's in store, but to understand the true significance of the Serenity Studio's name is to go inside. Once there, it all makes sense as you discover a bright and airy, while at the same time, cozy and welcoming artistic getaway. Colours abound and softly in the background, the melodic and peaceful voice of Norah Jones fills the air.

"Dreams are not selfish things and I am living my dream." That comes from Tracy-Lynn Chisholm, a beautifully vibrant woman whose tenacity not only created Serenity Studio but has caused it to become an artistic force in the city of Cornwall. "Serenity Studio is the culmination of a dream and is the blossoms of the seeds of courage planted yesterday," says Tracy-Lynn.

As one drifts from corner to corner in this delightfully eclectic studio, the symphony of colours, the diversity of styles and the realization that an amazing amount of talent has done all of this will quickly strike you. From traditional styles to whimsy and the abstract, your eyes are captivated by the beauty of it all.

But stop for a moment. If your instant impression is that Serenity

Studio is a quiet little sanctuary, think again. This wonderful oasis, tucked away at the corner of York and Fourth streets just off Cornwall's downtown core, is constantly abuzz with activity.

On Tuesday nights, artisans of every stripe gather to paint, weave and craft, with many of them regular contributors to the Cornwall region's popular Apples and Art tour.

Tracy-Lynn has also begun to hold regularly scheduled art classes for budding artists of all ages.

On Saturdays from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., Serenity Studio opens to the public. It's a unique opportunity for folks throughout the community to come to watch artists at work, and for those so inclined, to purchase an original piece of art.

Tracy-Lynn has been joined by six other artists to ensure the success of Serenity Studio. They have formed an artists cooperative to share ideas and to refine their artistic skills.

As you read the vignettes of MiSun Hunter, Emily MacLeod, Anne Wylemans and Margot Boucher, you'll get a better sense of others who are also 'beautifully-obsessed'.

Art, English and love on an airplane

They met nine years ago. MiSun was an illustrator in a South Korean Christmas card firm who had come to Canada for a brief stint to learn English. Derek Hunter was a Canadian arts educator who was then teaching English in her home country. By a quirk of fate, they both boarded the same flight en route to Seoul.

This happy coincidence soon took another bizarre twist when MiSun discovered that Derek was also an artist and one can only imagine the animated conversation that took place for the rest of the trip.

It wasn't long after that they started dating. Soon they realized their love was a permanent thing and they married. They returned to Canada to live in Cornwall, Derek's home time.

MiSun quickly settled in to her new life and new community. "Cornwall is a quiet small city and a friendly city where everyone knows and helps each other," she quietly declares. "I feel it is like a family community and I am happy here.

Her medium of choice is acrylics and she uses them to create boldly coloured and sometimes abstract, yet soft and comfortable works. Her experience as a card designer occasionally comes through in her



delightfully whimsical series: 'a girl with a balloon,' 'a girl with orange hair' and 'sweet family.' Then, there are the captivating abstracts of beautiful women and she makes good use of the vibrant acrylic tones.

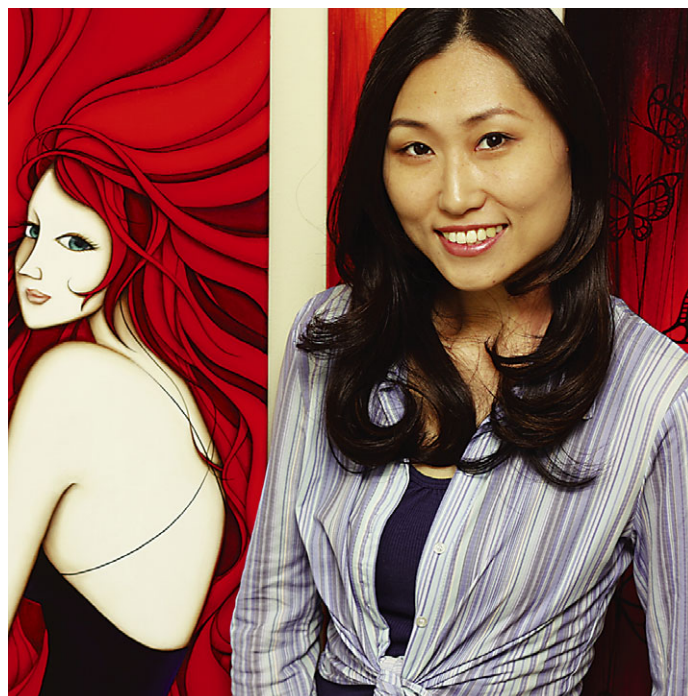
MiSun is nothing if not a most versatile artist with a wonderful ability to contrast her whimsy with beautifully stylized floral renderings with a distinctive Asian flair. She caps off her engaging treasures of artwork with her colourful but calming compositions of acrylics and thread on canvas.

Three years ago MiSun had the opportunity of attending the Cornwall region's renowned Apples and Art Tour in Cornwall and discovered Serenity Studio for the first time. "As soon as I came in the studio, I felt a good energy was going through me. I was so excited just being there." She was soon invited to join in the artists cooperative.

MiSun admits to a continual journey as her paintings come from her imagination and become a visual diary or photo album for her. The activity is also one of relaxation as it unravels the frustrations that can sometimes creep in when one is still learning about a culture so different from the country of her roots.

Because they are her diary, as she puts it, MiSun can have difficulty letting go (as in selling her paintings to an interested buyer). But, a recent encounter abruptly changed all that. A woman arrived in front of one of her paintings and stood, for the longest time, just taking in the colours and the beauty of the work. She suddenly turned and said, "This painting is talking to me." MiSun instantly understood that her visual 'diary' was one that needed to be shared.

"From that day on," she notes, "Whenever I see someone whom I believe really does hear my paintings, then it



is okay to let them go."

MiSun was asked about her penchant for painting women with flowing hair. Without hesitation, she refers to women's dynamic and continually changing emotions. As for the brilliant use of colours, it is, as MiSun puts it — "me trying to put life in my paintings and I use colours which can touch hearts."

Serenity Studio has allowed MiSun to find her Canadian wings and so soar. Her English is improving, her exhibits are increasing and she has become an independent spirit in her newfound land.



Margot Boucher - a magical artist

Montreal's loss has definitely been Cornwall's gain. This delightful transplant has become a mainstay of the city's burgeoning arts community and is an inspiration to those who have come to know her.

In refining her craft, she has made it her mission to learn from others. From a fine arts program at St. Lawrence College to workshops in eastern and central Ontario and as far away as New York State, Margot has observed, participated and ultimately learned the artistic prowess for which she is known and respected.

She is described as a prolific artist and one who is not afraid to be 'on stage.' Each year finds Boucher exhibiting her works in various parts of Ontario and Quebec and she is a regular at the Cornwall Regional Art Gallery as well as the Marchant Gallery in craft-rich Lancaster, just outside Cornwall.

Boucher, by her own admission, has an unbridled fondness for the luminosity of transparent watercolor. A challenging and unforgiving medium, she has nonetheless embraced it and according to her peers, makes it look easy. A signature member and award winner of the Ottawa Watercolour Society, she captures the spirit of her subjects and her paintings come alive. Vibrant colour flows in her dramatic floral works, and energy radiates

from her paintings of children depicting their vitality.

Margot has made it her mission to study and to learn from others including renowned watercolour guru, Ming Ma. Having been taught gave her the thirst to give back and she has become a highly respected educator within the local artistic scene. The highly popular Encore program at St. Lawrence College has snared her to teach a number of seniors' groups and it comes as no surprise that each of her courses has been sold out.

Boucher is also a traveler and photographer of note and uses both to her advantage. She recently visited Israel and upon her return, captivated the co-op members with stunning pictorials of her travels, all the while using the images as part of her inspiration to paint.

Margot is also one of the charter members of the artists cooperative. She has been a stalwart exhibitor ever since Serenity Studio first opened its doors.

According to Tracy-Lynn, "She has been my long standing peer, pushing me up my creative mountains, cheering me on, and giving me the steam to keep moving forward." Margot Boucher is not just a gem in the Cornwall arts community, she is a diamond with an everlasting sparkle and an artisan that the others all look up to.

The whimsical spirit of Tracy-Lynn

Individually talented and a woman driven to give others that same opportunity, Tracy-Lynn is a shining example of the many kinds of talent to be found in the Cornwall area.

The founder of Serenity Studio is a homegrown gal who has lived in Cornwall all her life. "All my family is here, my friends are here, my life is here" she says. "I'm in love with this city and the people in it and my dream is to create beauty and to put Cornwall on the map."

Tracy-Lynn's youthful appearance belies her considerable experience as an artist. Self-taught, she has been painting for close to 20 years and by her own admission, it has become her obsession. However, her journey to becoming a full-time and increasingly successful artist took time and much soul searching. Finally, as she puts it, "I took a leap of faith," and Serenity Studio was born.

Along the way was the successful completion of the St. Lawrence College Self Employment Assistance program, an experience that allowed her to acquire a number of sound business practices.

Serenity Studio's early days took the form of a small spare room in which Tracy-Lynn's unique style began to emerge. But then in a stroke of serendipity, something happened that would change her direction and ultimately, lead to a success she could barely imagine. An old building came up for sale which was the site of her grandfather's corner store. It didn't take much soul searching for her to decide she couldn't let the opportunity pass.

Some assistance from Cornwall's Heart of the City program helped in the process and Serenity Studio found its permanent home.

Happily for Tracy-Lynn, her talent was beginning to catch the eye of folks all across the city. In a somewhat whimsical gig, she succeeded in convincing upscale Fusion Grill into letting her set up her easel and as guests enjoyed some fine dining, they also got to enjoy beautiful art being created right before their eyes.

The word about talent can quickly spread in Cornwall and it wasn't long before other opportunities popped up and Chisholm began to capture a number of commercial opportunities to paint and to generate a regular income.

When asked about her creative preferences, she responds without hesitation. "I love, love, love acrylic paints and it's my medium of choice. I'm known for my use of exuberant colours and I love to create silly and whimsical works that make people laugh and be happy." As she so delightfully puts it, it is who she is and it is how she interacts with her world.

Tracy-Lynn enjoys the challenge of creating larger pieces and was given the opportunity to paint a number of full-sized murals for a variety of local clients.

A project that stood above the crowd, both literally as well as figuratively, was the work at Knox Fine Dining, an gastronomic delight situated in an old church in the quaint village of Moose Creek, some 30 minutes north of Cornwall. Working with colleague Jocelyn Nicholson, Tracy-Lynn created a spectacular faux-finish ceiling that stops guests in their tracks with its 'wow' factor.

As her reputation grew and her success began to pay off,



Tracy-Lynn set out on the next phase of her artistic quest — a mission to bring together other artists in the area and to give them a chance to let their talents shine. The result was the artists cooperative.

Her reputation is not only growing in Cornwall, it is being noticed outside the area as well. Recently, she was in Toronto to exhibit at the 'One-of-a-Kind Gift Show' and her works caught the eye of the event sponsors. Two of her paintings were selected for the show's advertising campaign in the *Toronto Star*. "The exposure was unbelievable," she reports with a giddy enthusiasm, "and I sold works like crazy."

Reflecting on her own community, Tracy-Lynn will be the first to tell you that it was Cornwall's support that gave her the courage to strike out on her own. In return, she gives back to it by using her talents to assist a number of local charitable agencies. A long list of local organizations have all benefitted because of Tracy-Lynn's creative way of saying thanks.

Serenity—with a Dutch Touch

The Cornwall region didn't know it at the time, but the arrival of this tall and willowy blond native of the Netherlands would prove to be a hidden gem.

Anne arrived in Canada more than 25 years ago. Once here, she settled into a full and happy life with her family and her comfortable home overlooking the majestic St. Lawrence River. Like many moms of her generation, she combined a solid husband and her delightful children with a career as a beauty consultant in the retail sector.

It's hard to say whether her flair for bringing out the hidden beauty of her large and loyal clientele is reflected in her art or, the beauty of her works is translated into radiance for her clientele. Whatever the case, Anne has mastered both milieus.

It appears it has been the magic of life along the river with its sparkling beauty during the day and the myriad of stars under soft summer nights that proved to be her inspiration. The greenery, the wide open spaces, and her own beautifully tended garden with its wonderful mix of colours has given her an abundance of ideas and she has captured the essence of this environment in her paintings.

"My medium of choice is acrylics and I love to texture the paint into billowing layers of clouds and the roughness of tree branches," she reflects. "It makes you want to touch the piece and feel the flow of the strokes which I encourage people to do." Anne's connection with the world of art assuredly stems from her old world heritage. Growing up in Holland, her talent emerged at a very young age as she began to create a variety of artistic works. At the tender age of 12 her works propelled her to an elite group of finalists in a national design contest in Amsterdam a notoriety that did not go unnoticed as some years later, her black and white drawings made media exposure in a weekly newspaper article.

Emigrating to a strange land with its distinctive Canadian culture was an intimidating experience to the young Anne, it took time to adjust to the vastness of her new home and the people who spoke a language which she found a challenge to master. With all of the challenges that come with being a new Canadian, the artistic influence of her mother was

clearly in her genes and it wasn't long before the lure of the canvas was too much to resist and her works began to flow.

Her Dutch heritage was distinctive, and as Anne herself put it, "My heritage comes through in my paintings, mostly through tulips and the red brick roofed villages that were so much a part of me as I was growing up." Anne's talent would soon become to be known and she talks about the time when she was approached by Tracy-Lynn, who had recalled meeting her many years earlier. "I was invited to join she and the others at Serenity Studio for the Tuesday night artists gathering and I recall being ecstatic," she recalls. "At last, I knew I was at the right place and that a dream I had had for so long was finally coming to pass." What has struck Anne and continues to impact on her is her love of Serenity Studio with its balance of art and diverse culture. "With artists from different lands and different traditions, we have a wonderful blend of personalities all of whom bring their distinctive styles into the mix," she says warmly as she reflects on those around her. "Tracy-Lynn inspired us to start our artistic co-op and it has become a place of inspiration."

As she settles back to her canvas, she muses about this beautiful obsession that has become the mantra of her artistic colleagues and it brings her to the realization that Cornwall, her home and her life, has emerged as a hidden gem in the art community of eastern Ontario.





From the Classroom to the Palette

Like many of the talented artists in the Cornwall region, Emily MacLeod is a native of the city and enjoys the fact that many of her family live here, too. Unlike Tracy-Lynn though, Emily's background is slightly different. Taking a different path than her self-taught colleague, MacLeod holds a degree in Fine Arts from venerable Queen's University and spent close to a dozen years as an educator in the city's secondary school system.

But then came Serenity Studio and a captivating invitation back into the artistic world. Emily, with no doubt much soul-searching, eventually made the decision to leave the security of academics and pursue an artistic career full time. It was a decision that is proving to be a good one for her as she has become an essential link in the growth and success of Serenity.

By her own admission, MacLeod's artistic influences are varied, having been exposed to an abundance of artists during her university years and having taught these styles to so many of the Cornwall and area's young people. As she puts it, "I learn something from each piece of art I see and each work I create."

Whatever inspiration strikes MacLeod, it comes with no small degree of excellence. She has been exhibited at group exhibitions in the Cornwall area, Kingston, and Ottawa and her works have been seen at juried exhibitions in Cornwall and New York State. Not only that,

MacLeod has savoured the success that can only come from earning awards, and she has done so at a number of events throughout the region.

Emily's medium of choice is oil and much of her works are done using this time-honoured material. Her preference is to create works on a large scale and that takes her both time and patience. "Painting in oil is about layers and patience," she says. "One layer is left to dry for a week or two and is then partially obscured by another layer. No matter how many layers you apply, whatever marks you make on a canvas will be felt and seen."

MacLeod has discovered that her art is an all-consuming pastime and once she puts a brush to canvas, all distractions seem to disappear. An absolute treasure when it comes to floral expressions, Emily has painted a striking collection of beautifully crafted flowers and the brilliance of her colours is captivating and quickly draws the viewer in.

Her still life depictions are equally as captivating. Taking common place items from inside the home and out, she paints wonderful and oftentimes wistful portraits that to the viewer, tell many stories.

Although putting paint to canvas has been MacLeod's first passion, she has suddenly discovered that her talents have recently developed a new dimension. She has created a line of recycled jewellery that according to her colleague and artistic soul mate, Tracy-Lynn, is 'flying off the shelves.'

Besides practicing her craft as a multi-faceted artist, Emily MacLeod has her own ideas about promoting art and artists in the Cornwall area. Among other things, it was she who dreamed up Serenity's Tuesday Night Studio, inspired by her missing the communal studio environment of her university days.

MacLeod is quick to point out the close relationship enjoyed by the dozens of talented artisans throughout the region. She notes Focus Art, the Cornwall Regional Art Gallery, Sue's Art Gallery and more recently, Serenity Studio as the means by which these far-ranging talents can maintain contact.

As she says, very succinctly, "It's easy for artists to stay in touch and up to date on the events taking place in the city. We've become a very supportive group and as we grow together, the strength of the arts in Cornwall will continue to flourish." These are strong words but they underscore how MacLeod views the burgeoning arts community and the growing impact it is having on the city's cultural milieu.

She goes on to talk about Serenity Studio as an important complement to Cornwall's flourishing arts community. She is quick to point out the vision held by Tracy-Lynn Chisholm and how that vision has resulted in an artistic venue that provides a unique locale for artists to display and to sell their work.

Emily MacLeod puts an interesting perspective on Serenity Studio: "This is not a typical white walls and track lighting gallery," she declares. "It's putting together interesting vignettes with the artwork and that becomes as much fun as creating the work itself."

The ever-changing displays, from the windows to the artwork itself, keeps the space fresh and ensures that visitors will have something new to see each time they return. It all comes down—as she puts it and as the advertising proclaims, to the fact that it really is a 'Beautiful Obsession.'

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