

Reluctant artist draws eyes to animals we might take for granted in Return of Spring



By Brock Weir

Artist Meredith Blunt knows instinctively when each painting, drawing and piece of art she creates is done, but she stops just shy of that one final flourish.

Whether she is working digitally, or through layer upon layer of acrylic paint, the brushstrokes are always completed, but the final step is up to you.

"I don't frame my art, I don't think it is my place," says Ms. Blunt, a resident of Aurora. "The home they go into needs to frame them."

Perhaps that's why her exhibition, *Return of Spring*, now hangs frameless at the Aurora Public Library's Colleen Abbott Gallery. In a building that has become a hub to so much of the community, just whose place would it be to make that all important final decision. Best to leave it open to interpretation.

Return of Spring is a collection of larger-than-life paintings that vividly depict migratory birds very familiar to Aurora residents.

"I feel really motivated about this theme of migration," says Ms. Blunt. "I was motivated to put something together that is cohesive with a strong statement of spring coming back and new stuff happening. In fact, migration is one thing that has been consistent in my own life."

Ms. Blunt has spent her life on the move. She has lived all over Canada, as well as the United Kingdom and spent her longest time at university in Halifax where she met and married her husband, and gave birth to two children before the family ultimately planted roots in Aurora three years ago.

A life-long artist, the admittedly shy Ms. Blunt says she always found she was better able to express herself through art where words failed.

"I can't rely on speaking and I write too much when I write," she says. "It gets too muddled and it doesn't come out right, but through my paintings I seem to be able to make them say exactly what I want them to do. What I like about painting is I'm not the

one who has to talk, but I love hearing people's interpretations of what I painted. I know what I mean in my paintings, and if someone identifies that, or connects with that in their own way, it is really exciting.?

Return of Spring is the third splash the reluctant Ms. Blunt has made in the local arts scene over the past year, first getting her feet wet as an exhibiting artist at Art at the Manor, the annual exhibition held at Hillary House National Historic Site, as well as opening up her home studio for the Aurora Artists Studio Tour.

At the time, she said she didn't know what to expect putting herself out there, and this time around she attributes the exhibition to ?local pushy people in the best possible way?, but the winds of migration were at her back as well, helping the local pushy people get her to the gallery.

But is it getting easier with each public showing?

?Yes, and no,? she says with a laugh. ?I have to remind myself not to blather on and to lower my shoulders out of my ears, not be so nervous and to have some confidence I do know what I am talking about, I know what I am doing and that is okay. These are tiny baby steps in being okay with doing this.

?When I hung these paintings with my dad, we took a step back and I had this whole sensation of, ?Whoa, I did this!' It hit me really strong. It was surreal.'?

Also ?surreal? was Ms. Blunt being stopped during her interview with The Auroran by a member of the public to tell the artist just how beautiful her paintings are.

?I hope people identify and create personal stories with the birds,? she says. ?I really hope they pick favourites out of the five, identify with the species, the colours, or the composition, and find some familiar ground. I want them to take away that we really have these beautiful animals to look at every day and we shouldn't take them for granted.

?[My family is going through] a hard go right now, but I have maintained focus and painted five of the strongest paintings I have ever done. I am super proud of that. That, in itself, is a massive goal to hit, I think.?

Return of Spring runs through Sunday.