

Estate of Helen Lucas partners with Cultural Centre for spring sale



Sprouting flowers are synonymous with Spring's arrival, and, if you're a local art lover, there are fewer names more synonymous with flowers than Helen Lucas, the late King-based artist, who expressed herself through vivid herbaceous slashes of paint.

This spring, art lovers will have the opportunity to share in Lucas' legacy with a Spring Sale from the Estate of Helen Lucas, hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The sale will include more than 200 drawings, prints and paintings, which will be sold online May 22 through June 5 and in-person from May 29 and June 2 at Lucas' studio in King Township, which remains largely untouched since her death in November 2023.

The sale is being organized by Frank Simonetta, Lucas' son-in-law and the representative of her estate, and Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre.

While Lucas held a solo show at the Centre in 2018, it was before Jones arrived at the Centre. She first encountered Lucas' work when curating the 2024 exhibition, *Seven Masters*, featuring select pieces from the collection of the Georgina Centre for Arts and Culture.

“As we were exhibiting her works from their collection, we wanted to make sure we were giving her her proper place in the show,” says Jones. “There were three artworks by Helen Lucas in their collection, but it just didn't seem like enough.”

Simonetta helped flesh out Lucas' presence in this posthumous exhibition and many others were thus able to learn about the popular artist and what fuelled her passion.

“I hadn't even heard about Helen Lucas really because I have only been here for three years,” says Jones. “Just from being around her work and getting to work so closely with it, I can say she is probably my favourite artist of all time, just because of the journey she had and her practice. She came from a small town in Saskatchewan, came here as a young woman, went to OCAD, went through some troubled relationships, but eventually found happiness. I think that's what's so compelling about her – just her resilience and her ability to express it through her art.”

“She has very distinct eras – kind of a darker, sadder and trying-to-discover-yourself eras – and going into full flowers, which is just self-embracing and self-loving. Because her work is so expressive and so intimate, it's hard to believe she is a regional artist. You

don't hear about these artists of southern Ontario making works like this. I call her the 'Georgia O'Keeffe of Southern Ontario.' She's totally different, but I think she should be put in that calibre. What's really important right now is because she is such an important feminist artist, especially during the time she was creating work about her experience being in a relationship that was oppressive, then coming out of it and finding stability, I think it is really politically important right now with what we're seeing in the States and, I think, the fear that is happening down in the United States. Canadians are being very conscious of their rights and especially women in particular. I would just love more people to see her work and see the fight that she fought, and maybe it will make them feel some comfort that she was able to overcome and find happiness.?

The online sale begins Thursday, May 22, at 9 a.m., running to Thursday, June 5.

24-hour early access to the online sale will go to subscribers to the Flower Friends e-newsletter, which is facilitated by the Cultural Centre.

The in-person sale from Thursday, May 29 to Monday, June 2, will take place each day from 12 noon to 6 p.m. at Lucas' home and studio in King, the address to which will be announced May 28.

Lucas was born in Weyburn, SK, in 1931 to Greek immigrant parents.

'Her life-long artistic practice reflects a journey of both internal and external transformation,' says the Centre. 'Early works, often somber charcoal drawings, depicted sorrowful, subdued portraits reflective of womanhood within a patriarchal society. Over time, and following the separation from her first marriage, her style evolved into bold, joyful flower paintings that celebrate colour and life. Frequently working on a large scale, Lucas often painted entire canvases in a single day. In the 1970s, she became an influential figure in the feminist movement, using her art to speak out against the oppression of women within a patriarchal society and to express femininity through her work.' From 1972 to 1979, she taught drawing and painting at the University of Toronto and Sheridan College, and she was a guest lecturer and artist at various universities, panels, TV and radio programs, and publications.

'Throughout her career, Lucas held over 50 solo exhibitions, both nationally and internationally, including Why Do I Paint Flowers?', her 2018 solo exhibition at the Aurora Cultural Centre. In 2003, her work was selected for exhibition at the Florence Biennale. Her art is represented in numerous collections, including The Canadian War Museum, The King City Municipal Offices, SickKids Hospital, The Sunnybrook Odette Cancer Centre, and the Georgina Centre for Arts and Culture.'

For more, visit: auroraculturalcentre.ca/helen-lucas-spring-sale.

By Brock Weir