

LOCAL NEWS

reaffirmed by international residency

Canadian ever selected. In her letter to Slak she explained, "Somewhere in our history we passed a divide where politics began to be more highly valued than culture." She went on to state that "culture is almost identical to people or nations, as in French culture. Culture also refers to art, music, literature, educational television, in short, everything that is uplifting and edifying as opposed to commerce ... In a politicized age, few people look at art for its ability to create contemplative space in the midst of our restless lives. But art invites us to another experience. Thus allowing us to achieve a new wholeness of spirit."

A voyage of rediscovery

She left on Sept. 2, taking up residence in a guest studio. Much of her first month was spent soaking up the culture of the country she had left 51 years ago. She pursued her love of 17th century painters, who continue to move her. Rembrandt's "Jewish Bride" has "such beauty, gentleness, colour." A Vermeer portrait of a girl standing in front of a window exudes a total stillness. Urbanization and the machine age

has brought with it modernism and abstract painting. Colour, shape and texture defined the work, not the story-telling of earlier masters. The God-fearing ideology of Rembrandt and Vermeer was gone.

After the 1950s people moved away from tradition, and pillars of society disappeared along with many of the old rituals. With those losses, the identity of the group was lost. People began to see themselves more as individuals.

While she was in residence Wilhelmina read an article explaining that there was a nostalgia for the past now that the borders have been removed throughout much of Europe. People are feeling insecure. Their identity is gone.

That feeling of nostalgia was exemplified in a chance meeting she had with an 80-year-old man who was cutting reeds along the side of a road. The man placed the reeds in his pond to let air escape when the pond froze. He bemoaned the fact that there were fewer places to get them anymore. Wilhelmina accepts that her despair over "what is lost has seeped into her consciousness and into her work.

She was reminded again of her past during a visit to a church. She was moved by the fervour of the parishioners. They were there to serve God, not for a social get-together and a short talk. The experience was a direct tie with the roots she has kept through her life.

Her childhood home

While she was in Holland Wilhelmina returned to visit her childhood home over the Mauritshuis Gallery. In 1952 it housed a stable, but beautiful collection and was run by her father and one other person. It now has a staff of 40 and hosts mega shows. Millions have been spent to modernize the small home to protect the valuable works. But it is much more crowded now and has lost some of its airiness.

When Canadian Cultural Attache Marcel Louman heard Wilhelmina's childhood story of



PHOTO BY TED AMSDEN

Wilhelmina Kennedy has returned to Canada after a three-month residency at the prestigious Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague.

living over the gallery he proposed a 2005 show to open in Den Haag. It would include six paintings she completed while she was there this fall, and others she has yet to complete. She's amazed at his support.

The three-month trip to Holland has been a period of tremendous growth for the Canadian artist. Being alone, and without responsibilities, she had to face herself and ask why she was doing this. She was able to put a mirror in front of herself and realize that what she is doing is possible.

It has reinforced the strong body of faith that supports her. And perhaps it has clarified her sense of self within her world.

As she recently stated, "I have always been guided by a higher power and have never been alone. It's always there like an image of a bird with wings. I am safe under the wings."

Her art is part of that belief and her sense of loss — a manifestation of it. The edifices are not alive any more with

people in them. There are bars on the buildings and a tremendous sadness. She can't go in.

When asked to reflect on her trip, there is no question that it was memorable, an opportunity to reinforce and to grow, a time to see herself by reflecting off others, a time to meet with people rich and poor both in material and in spirit. "When I came home I felt so rich — knowing I can go on and make something worthwhile."

Now that she is back home, Wilhelmina is moving on. She has her next piece well under way as she follows her daily regimen of three hours of work. She is incorporating gold paper with her acrylics, a new experiment in adding a third dimension to her work.

She continues to live a lifestyle that matches her beliefs. She's a classical woman and acknowledges that lifestyle reflects beliefs. She lives simply, surrounded by a few articles of personal value, and uncluttered beauty in a home that reflects her grace.

2 — THE COLBORNE CHRONIC

Artist

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Wilhelmina Kennedy has been showing her work professionally for more than 20 years, and painting much longer than that. Her published retrospective lists four series of works. Even as reproductions, they are a provocative, engaging, and imposing sample of an extensive body of work, highly representative of the beliefs of their creator.

She was one of the founding members, and for the first five years of its operation, the curator of the Colborne Art Gallery.

Last fall she had her professionalism reaffirmed in a three-month residency in Holland. The trip has led to a proposed exhibition in Holland in 2005 as part of the 60th anniversary celebration of the end of the Second World War.

Last year the Cramahe painter sent a letter of intent to Slak, the largest organization to arrange residencies for artists in Holland. One place is held for foreign residents. Wilhelmina was the first

15