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Judith Kreps-Hawkins dispels boundaries in gallery show

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Port Hope artist Judith Kreps-Hawkins is exploring the limits of human understanding and expression, engaging in the passion of communication with her work.

The results are startling at times, always absorbing, often riveting.

Her work, on display at the Colborne Art Gallery until Aug. 3, is often multi-layered, created largely with some of the myriad of found objects she has collected at home and in her travels.

It is impossible to leave the show untouched.

One provocative piece is a metal box containing pen and ink sketches of former aging hospital patients once in her care. The drawings peel back the stereotypes and reveal the ravages inflicted on the aged.

Another has a painting of a striking young woman mounted on a door. The eyes of the woman, painted when Ms. Kreps-Hawkins was a student, are distant. They capture the viewer, taking them to places shrouded in mystery.

A rotting old umbrella has been transformed into a parasol with an ethereal other-world feel.

The works, the products of an active, probing, artistic intellectual, capture viewers in the non-verbal explorations of Ms. Kreps-Hawkins' fertile mind.

The fascinating artist took time to talk about her life and the evolution of her work in an interview a few days after the opening her show June 21.

Ms. Kreps-Hawkins works are an act of communication on several levels — with herself, with her materials and with her non-verbal techniques.

She suspects her work is about creation and life, but admits it is difficult to explain her art verbally. She understands we are multi-layered and multi-dimensional; to delve into the multi-faceted human experience demands different techniques and materials.

She equates it to childhood play where play is just for the sake of playing, just to find out

what something is about — tasting, touching feeling. While very conversant about her experiences, she admits she's not mature enough to understand the process.

It's about giving herself permission to be as open-minded as she can be and see through younger eyes. Once there, she acknowledges the world is full of mystery and wonder — it is beyond encompassing. She is left with intuition to guide her.

Ms. Kreps-Hawkins believes creativity is universal.

"We're all part of one huge universal entity," she says. "We are all creating, moving, flowing. Art is an expression of things which are not tangible enough, not describable with spoken language."

It is also never-ending. "I feel like I'm on the way," says the artist. "When you get to your vision, you look again and there is a whole new vista."

Ms. Kreps-Hawkins has shed the construct of the human mind called time.

"Time as we understand it doesn't exist. Memory and time are within us. We are all products of our experiences," she says.

Hard work

The actual process of creating her work is often gruelling. Sitting

amongst the piles of found objects in her cottage studio, she'll spend hours questioning why she does this. It's what she calls her "chaos state". When she is there, she has to give it up for a bit until she moves into another way of thinking.

She'll put something in place and the art will begin to take form and meaning. The beginning becomes the sign post, directing her where to explore.

As she prepared for her current show, she had five or six pieces started. At times, she would have to sit down in the middle of the room and wait for them to tell her how to develop them.

Ms. Kreps-Hawkins feels



Judith Kreps-Hawkins of Port Hope explores and expands the human horizon in her latest exhibition of her artwork, "Overlapping", at the Colborne Art Gallery.

much of what she does is connected with hidden things that seem out of our control. Given that thought, she asserts everything is within our control: "We just don't know. We are the creators. We can control."

She wonders aloud why we don't and offers it is fear of the unknown.

During her career as a nurse, Ms. Kreps-Hawkins was interested in alternative approaches to healing. She recognized that as we get older we have greater healing needs, sometimes from diseases and illnesses we have created ourselves.

We have the ability to

1965 and took time from her art while working and raising her children, then got back into it through university studies at Concordia in Montreal. It was during those four years that she was introduced to sculpting and given all sorts of liberties.

She began to play with wood and metal, sandblasting, using the scroll saw and whatever else was available. The experiences have left her with an ongoing fascination with three-dimensional work.

Nothing is taboo

Salmon and lake trout skeletons wash up on the shores of Lake Ontario near her home. She waits for the seagulls to pick them clean, then dries them in the sun.

One of the skeletons in her Colborne Art Gallery show lay in her garden for a year on a rock. She brought it in, took it apart, then reassembled it with a wire running up the middle. Ms. Kreps-Hawkins suggests it has attitude and it is hard to deny she has a point as she manipulates it over its rock.

Ms. Kreps-Hawkins refuses to live or think inside the box.

When considering how to price her work, she came up with the idea of charging \$300 for a single piece, \$500 for two or \$1,000 for a bag full.

It isn't a conventional approach to valuing art, but the concept hasn't deterred visitors to the gallery — some of her works were sold in the first few days.

Ms. Kreps-Hawkins, a former Colborne resident, currently lives in Port Hope with her husband Bart Hawkins-Kreps, a writer, publisher and designer. She has two children, five grandchildren and is proudly a great-great aunt.

The show is well worth the visit to the gallery. Her work is sometimes provocative, sometimes all-absorbing, and guaranteed to make you think.

The Colborne Art Gallery, located at 51 King Street East in Colborne is open during the summer months from noon to 5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.

"uncreate" them.

"Healing is a creative process," she says.

Judith Kreps-Hawkins was a war baby, raised in England, educated in the disciplined British education system. Those years of doing without have left her as a saver of everything. Fortunately, she grew up in an artistic family where she was allowed to tap into her creative gifts.

While training as a nurse at St. Bartholomew's Teaching Hospital in London, she was able to attend operas and shows at the Palladium, Covent Garden and other venues.

She immigrated to Canada in