



There are figures like a grim reaper, animals such as mice, dinosaurs, bugs, flowers, ducks and butterflies, while others are abstract creations.

John grew up on a farm in Germany, and while he was interested in drawing, his education was in agriculture. Living in Soviet-occupied East Germany after the war, he was forced

off the land with only 24 hours' notice in the fall of 1945. Private farms were being expropriated as part of "agricultural reform".

He escaped to West Germany, clinging to the underside of a train, and ended up in Hamburg, where he met a community of artists. He had enough talent to go to an art college, but not enough money to do so. He went back to farming, met and married Gisela, and they started raising a family.

One day they saw an ad in their newspaper from the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had been authorized to recruit farmers with families to come and work in Canada.

West Germany was being re-armed as part of the Cold War, and John was glad to move his family to a country

where his son would not likely be conscripted. They arrived here by boat in 1954 and worked on several farms, including two near Georgetown.

As a chicken farm manager, he became disillusioned with modern industrial farming methods. He ended up working as a welder at PG Bell in Georgetown, producing enameled steel products.

Even on the farm though, he had started collecting art. His first picture, which he got on a rental plan at a picture loan society, is still hanging in his hallway. When he was delivering eggs to restaurants in Toronto, he found time to visit galleries.

The Sommers encouraged artists to display their work matted, but unframed, since customers often prefer to choose their own style of frame. Since the gallery was part of their home, and they earned their main living at other jobs, they were able

to specialize in original art, instead of having to sell

reproductions. They could also allow artists to exhibit their work at relatively low cost.

Along the way, they acquired a large collection of art, some of which was donated to the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre at the University of Guelph.

More recently, they donated about 200 examples of contemporary printmaking, painting, sculpture and photography, by Canadian artists, to the Art Gallery of Peel, near Gage Park in Brampton. Many of these works were featured in an exhibition last year at Joshua Creek Heritage Art Centre in Oakville.

The Sommers have always hoped for the establishment of a public art gallery in Georgetown- something more extensive than the displays at The Gallery in the Halton Hills Cultural Centre. John's contributions to the local art scene have been honoured with the John Sommer Juried Art Exhibition at the Centre.



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