



1515 Blanshard Art Gallery, Artist Profiles

In our last edition we featured the art galleries of 1515 Blanshard and now we highlight the stories behind two of the artists whose works hang on the walls at the Ministry of Health.



Jean Oliver, Finding Creativity in Turbulence

The Ministry of Health's art galleries provide opportunities to showcase local artists and their work. Jean Oliver is a Victoria-based artist who has had her work featured in the Gallery 5 art space. Drawing and painting have provided a lifelong retreat for Jean from childhood through adulthood, as it provides her with a calm and centering place.

As Jean says, "Art and writing are the kind of friends who accept us as who we are, without an agenda of their own."

In addition to viewing the craft as a friend, Jean likes the degree of control she is offered by "simply practicing," as it now makes up a large part of her personal identity.

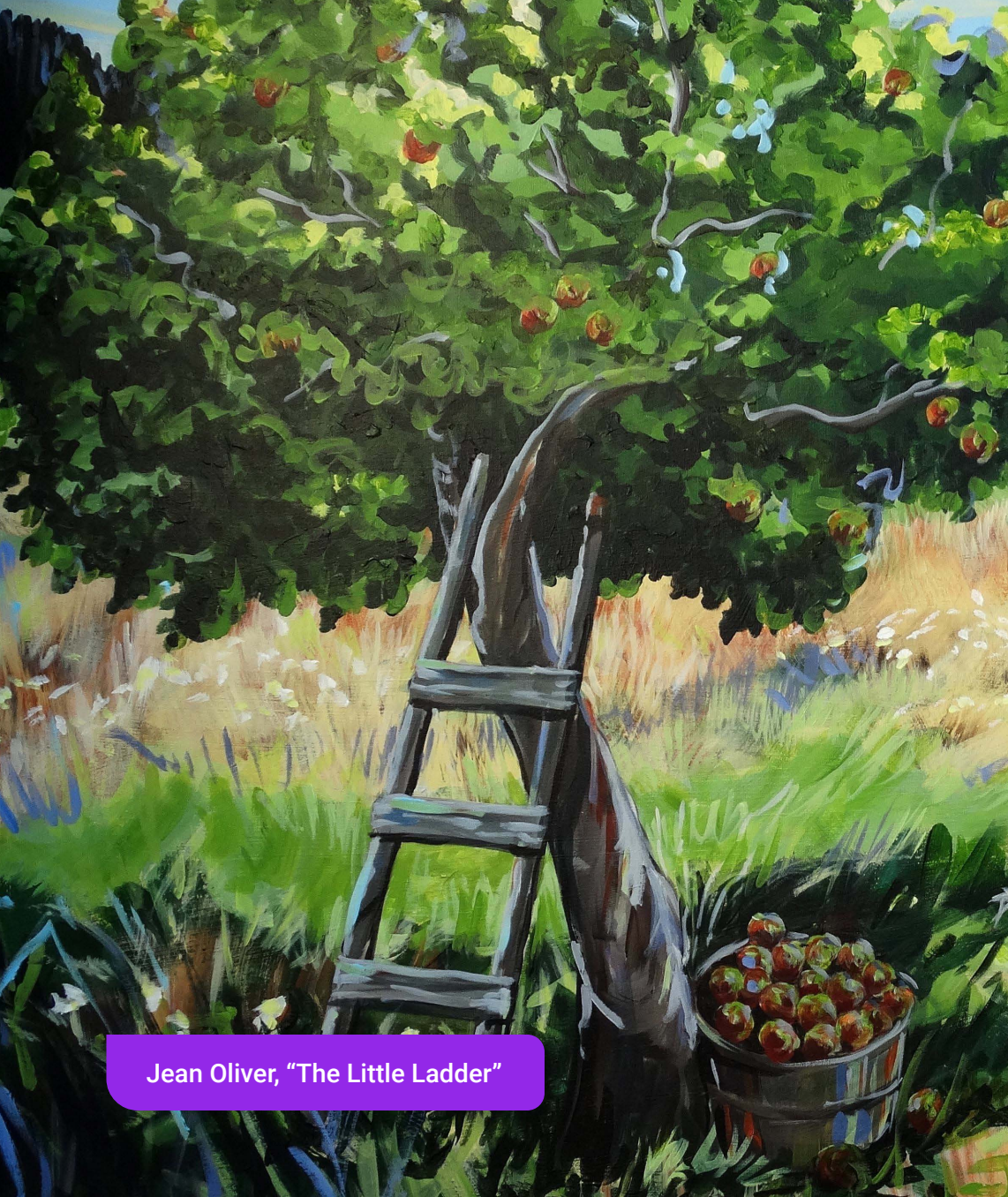
Jean's Approach to Art

In addition to being an artist, Jean has also trained as a tutor and specializes in teaching art to children with autism. Jane draws her inspiration from famed Pacific Northwest artist Emily Carr and the backgrounds in early Disney films, which heavily influenced the style in her landscapes and trees. The other essential component to Jean's approach is her need to paint outdoors, or as she refers to it, "en-plein-air," which allows her to breathe movement and light into the canvases that she later puts the finishing touches on in the studio.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jane was put in a position where she had to find a new studio space to work on her art. To her, this was initially a "devastating loss," but turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as by chance, Jean (through a series of friends and contacts) was able to find space in the basement at Emily Carr's House of All Sorts in Victoria. Being able to produce her art in her mentor's original space in the city has been amazing for Jean, who is all too happy with the silver lining the pandemic enabled her to find.

Jean's Displays at the Ministry

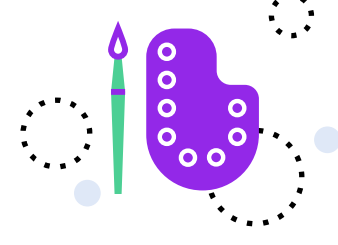
Jean's work has been displayed during a few of the shows at the ministry, and her most recent favourite showcased work is one called 'The Little Ladder.' The piece depicts an old ladder leaning up against an apple tree, speaking to the relationship "we all have with each other." As Jean notes, the cycle of "nature gives us the apples, the tree gives that bounty to the farmer, and the farmer brings nourishment to us." This work caught the eye of the owner of the Central Art Studio & Gallery in downtown Victoria, and Jean has now gained a spot in the gallery there as a permanent resident artist. In addition, the owner and his wife purchased the painting for their own personal collection.



Jean Oliver, "The Little Ladder"

The Importance of the Ministry Galleries

Aside from featuring art that is beautiful to look at, Jean refers to the galleries at 1515 Blanshard as being essential to supporting good mental health in the artistic community. As Jean notes, the pandemic has emphasized the need for "calm, warm, safe, and constant places" like Gallery 5 at the Ministry of Health. Anytime a way is made for an artist to show, it creates a cascading effect of good that flows not just to the artist, but also to the greater community.



Shannon Holms, Communicating Through Art

Shannon Holms recently retired from the B.C. Public Service, most recently with the Ministry of Health, and has been giving back through the ministry's art galleries.

Shannon has been drawing and painting "since she could pick up a pencil," and now that she retired, she can dedicate herself to creating her art full-time, which is leading to new fulfillment for her.

Shannon has spent most of her life on, or around, Vancouver Island, and has always found herself involved with the creative arts, eventually studying Fine Arts at the University of Victoria. In addition to public service positions in the field of communications and engagement, Shannon has also been an art director, make-up artist, stage and set designer, as well as a mural painter. In so many ways, Shannon was a full-time artist in waiting.

Shannon's Approach to Art

Arts and creative design is something that Shannon has "always done in her life," and her lifelong focus has been on the inspiration she finds in "capturing the light" around her. From Shannon's perspective, light can transform a figure or a landscape in "just a matter of seconds," and she strives to convey this in her paintings by capturing this "fleeting magic." In addition to this, Shannon finds her inspiration in "beauty, boldness, and colour," focusing on painting the natural worlds and portraits, referencing artists like Klimt, Van Gogh, and Monet. She defines her style as an artist as "realistic at times and stylized with drama, light, and colour" for other pieces.

Shannon's Displays at the Ministry

Shannon's work has been featured in multiple art shows and galleries since 2014, including the galleries at the ministry, but it is her current project for which she expresses the most pride. As a former employee of the ministry, and with her connections to the health-care sector, Shannon has taken on an ambitious undertaking during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a free portrait to any health-care worker who sends her a photo.

This has led to the creation of 20 portraits of health-care workers in B.C., under Shannon's "B.C. Health-Care Heroes" project, which she has done as a tribute to those frontline workers in the province "who are making the great sacrifices to help patients impacted by COVID-19." Shannon's reasoning for the project, besides being able to give back, is to "document the faces, names, and the voices of the pandemic" ensuring that she is able to "celebrate the efforts of these workers" and "communicate that historical information during the pandemic."

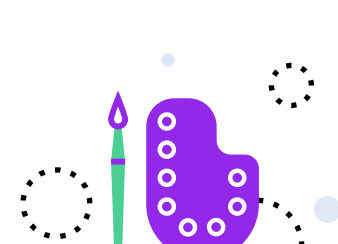
During Fall 2020, eight of these portraits were part of the Dr. Bonne Henry Tribute Art Show that were hung in the hallways leading to the office of the Provincial Health Officer. The ministry will be highlighting all 20 portraits in the downstairs lobby at 1515 Blanshard in May 2021.



Shannon Holms, "Sandra from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority"

The Importance of the Ministry Galleries

Shannon defines the galleries at 1515 Blanshard as extremely important, providing that they have given local artists the opportunity to showcase their work and allowed people working in the ministry to "appreciate art on a daily basis." She has nothing but gratitude for those who have "worked tirelessly" to put together the galleries and put on the shows that add that light to the hallways. To learn more about the "B.C. Health-Care Heroes" project, you can visit its Facebook page [here](#)*



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