

Artists help protect wildlife they love

Nova Scotia Nature Trust will benefit from show Saturday in Dartmouth Sportsplex

By ELISSA BARNARD Arts Reporter



Jacqueline Verge is near tears as she sits at a boardroom table and talks about saving wild spaces and wildlife.

"Some day some of these things may be gone," says the wildlife artist. "If enough people see what we see or feel what we feel, they might want to experience it themselves."

"Right now on mainland Nova Scotia the Canadian lynx and the moose are endangered," interjects fellow wildlife artist Sandy Moser, organizer of Saturday's group wildlife art show at the Dartmouth Sportsplex.

It's a fundraiser for the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, a non-profit organization that conserves land through acquisition, conservation agreements and stewardship.

"There is so much clear cutting and stress," says Verge, who lives near Lawrencetown Beach.

"And the ATVs," says artist Barbara Cronk, joining in the discussion. "Moose are very nervous and they're not breeding."

"That's why I chose (to support the) Nova Scotia Nature Trust," says Moser. "They acquire the land and they preserve it."

The artists spent their childhoods steeped in birdsong and forest creatures. Today they celebrate nature in their art. Moser grew up in the Annapolis Valley and for 35 years has lived in Sheet Harbour where she is surrounded by nature.

"I photograph the loons, the herons, deer, bear — you name it — and 15 years ago I started to paint wildlife."

"I've always been interested in being outside," says Verge, who grew up in Amherst. "You see things you wouldn't normally see and you want to capture that. There's a value to it and it's very deep inside and when it comes out it's awesome."

"When it comes out right," laughs Cronk, who grew up in Nova Scotia and Ontario and now lives in Gaetz Brook. "I've got wildlife up the yin-yang around me. If I didn't have that, there would be something dying inside me," she said. "It alarms me when I'm in the woods and I don't hear a sound and it's happening more and more."

The three artists base their paintings on intimate experiences of nature. Moser loves the loons that she often sees and photographs when she canoes. Once when she and her husband were canoeing they saw a mother and her baby.

"She put the little one by the rock and dove and came up to us by the canoe and looked at us and dove again so we were there to babysit the little one for half an hour."

"I had something similar with a beaver," says Cronk. "She brought her kit up to see me. I was very honoured."

Verge's images depend on "what I've seen and how I've seen it," she says. One morning while she was in Gaspé National Park she saw two moose about to touch nuzzles.

"I saw them move into position and I hollered to my husband, 'You get that!' and I was totally enthralled. And the mist was coming up from the wild raspberries."

Art and the Nova Scotia Nature Trust are a great fit, says the trust's executive director Bonnie Sutherland. "Artists help wake Nova Scotians up to the fact they do care and are connected to the land whether they are environmentalists or not," she says.

While people hesitate to call themselves environmentalists, "more and more people are starting to notice what's happening in their own backyard," says Sutherland.

For example, she points to the development of the shoreline that is preventing access to beaches. In Nova Scotia 95 per cent of the coastline is privately owned and 75 per cent of land is privately owned, says Sutherland. In most provinces 90 per cent of the land is crown land.

"We tried to wake up Nova Scotians 15 years ago and now people are hearing and seeing there is a threat and it's not too late."

'Artists help wake Nova Scotians up to the fact they do care and are connected to the land whether they are environmentalists or not.'

BONNIE SMITH - Nova Scotia Nature Trust