



ARTS

VISUAL ART

A WALK IN THE WOODS

Ingrid McMillan redirects nature thoughts into captivating canvasses

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Nature's long been a great source of inspiration for visual arts, and not only in the annoyingly overt terms of Thomas Kinkade. Take Winnipeg artist Ingrid McMillan as a most excellent example: *Dream Home*, her most recent exhibit, was birthed from many years of walking in St. Vital Park. But the 15 original works certainly aren't sketches of squirrels.

Dream Home is concerned with the interaction of human consciousness with wild spaces. Many layers of paint were delicately applied to wood and canvas. Some represent the flood of 2010, while others meditate on settling snow. Each is an attempt to seek answers to the same questions the Romantics pondered long ago: how can emotional - some may say spiritual - beings relate to nature in a hyper-rational world?

"I would pick up anything randomly at my feet - there would be cigarette butts, or pieces of wood - and without judging would stick anything in a plastic bag and go back to work and stick it in Model Magic and create the surface of the park in snow," explains McMillan, who also works as an art teacher with the Pembina Trails School Division. "I used toy cars for the treads of the tires, and that rhythm of walking the pavement."

Remarkably, *Dream Home* is McMillan's second gallery opening of 2014, hot on the heels of the fascinating *Brain Uncoiled*, which sought to explore the intricacies of the human brain and psyche. For that project she selected 18 emotions, including shame, hope and humility. Cotton cord was used as cerebral cortex, freshwater pearls as neurons, glitter as synapses firing.

"*Dream Home* is a continuation of the themes of *Brain Uncoiled*, but the setting has evolved from a petri dish to Winnipeg's own St. Vital Park, where I walk every morning," she notes. "*Dream Home* is about that evolving consciousness that started with the *Slow Movement* external observation, went to the brain and has now extended to nature."

Another personal byproduct of the daily walks was a marked calming of McMillan's artistic process. In the past, each work would take up to 80 hours to complete. That's changed. For one, they're smaller. She also notes that her process isn't as frantic. The process of creating *Dream Home* was more like plucking ideas off an assembly line and applying them in studio, as opposed to forcing them out.

"I look at the trees and how they just show up, no matter the conditions of their environment," McMillan explains. "They're ego-less. They survive. So I applied that presence to myself. I noticed my fear or worry or preoccupation with imagining; I just wanted to be like the trees and the grasses that just exist in nature and transcend my ego and petty distractions.

"I think it's really essential that we do commune with nature," she concludes. "It really has healed my own frenetic pace that I had at one time in my life. I do attribute it to the acceleration of technology. I think that the reversal is kicking in very slowly. Watching nature daily and making some work changes has helped me recognize that I too am just nature."

Step into the Dream Home Friday, Oct. 3 to Tuesday, Oct. 14 at Cre8ery Gallery and Studio.

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