

# A group of artists learn the finer points of floral and wax



**Photo Credit Julia Lovett**  
Donna Folk puts the finishing touches on her painting.

## JULIA LOVETT

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**FORT ST. JOHN** - On a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon a group of artists gathered together in a converted garage 10 minutes outside of town to paint and practice their craft.

The group, led by artist Donna Folk, was painting calla lilies and according to Folk, the artists were all part of an advanced class and their work showed their skill.

She said her painting career spans half a century and looking around her spacious house with high vaulted ceilings, sunbeams streaming through the windows and snow shimmering on the trees outside, you get the sense of where she gets her inspiration.

As you walk through the house and look around, her walls are covered by paintings, and serves as her gallery - a signature move among artists.

I love painting with oils because you can do much more with them. If you make a mistake, you can wipe it off and redo it, you can't do that with acrylic, she said.

encaustics artist came in and taught a beginner group about her favorite form of art.

"What fascinates me about it is...it's the colours. They are in a unique shine and brightness and they mix and they never fade," she said.

"It's a medium I just fell in love with," she added.

Gut explained that she got involved with the art form after she received a card from her cousin and thought the card was so beautiful, she immediately began working on educating herself on the art, which dates back to the Egyptian era. What she said is truly unique about the form is that the paintings that were done 2,000 years ago, still look exactly as they were then. Time has not aged them.

According to Gut, the word 'encaustics' comes from a Greek origin meaning 'to burn into'. It uses wax as the paint by heating it up - the paint, a mixture of beeswax and tree-sap resin, which

acts as a binder.

She explained that in the beginning, she did her own work and sold it at craft sales.

"People liked them so much and were interested in it and I thought, 'well, I actually have the advantage up here, nobody knows about it, so I could teach that' and that's what I did, I started introduction classes," said Gut.

After she developed a name in the local art circles, Folk had enquired about taking a class and afterward, Gut was invited to teach the medium at Folk's home studio.

"I do it (teach) not regularly but when we have enough students," she said, noting that she continued her education with well-known encaustics artists so she could develop and grow.

The studio itself was abuzz with chatter as they painted. One of her helpers, Carlo Suarez, was framing some of the pieces that were already finished and said he started nine months ago after he said Folk told him he had to be involved.

"At first she told me that I

this," he said, referring to the reason he keeps coming back to help. Suarez said that when he first began studying with Folk, he would develop any sort of artistic skill and now he said that when he paints, it gives him peace.

"[It] gives you more time to forget about stresses in your life and just do painting," he said.

For more information on Folk's art classes and guest instructors, go to: [Donnafolk.com](http://Donnafolk.com)

"It was just something I really like doing and I always did it for myself and sold my paintings," Folk added.

She explained that when she began developing a reputation, people asked her to teach them and it was 12 years ago, that she decided that it was time to teach.

The artist studied at the Bob Ross Art Workshop and is a Certified Ross Instructor (CRFI) and a Alexander Certified Instructor. Ross was

most famous for his Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) T.V. show, "The Joy of Painting." During the show he taught viewers how to paint landscapes using the wet-on-wet painting technique that allows for the colours to blend more smoothly. The technique doesn't let the layers to dry as opposed to traditional oil painting and is usually done in one day.

"I just love being with students. It's so nice when people say 'oh I can't paint a stick man' and I say 'well that's great, because if you could paint a stick man, you're disqualified, you know too much.'" I can take them and I can get them from thinking they can't paint to doing beautiful paintings," she said.

Folk explained that along with her class, she has other artists come in and give lessons in different art forms. While the oil painters were finishing up, Irene Gut, an



would start painting with her as her helper...so then I can assist her and help other students while doing the painting class," he said.

Suarez explained that as her helper and caregiver, he was taught how to paint so they could work together and when a student was in need, he would be able to assist the newcomer as he had already painted the piece ahead of time.

"It's the joy and the relaxation in doing stuff like



# Arts & Culture

## Art is a way of life

**Tanya Shymko creates, teaches and inspires all artistic skill levels in Fort St. John**

**ALEISHA HENDRY**

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While other kids were out playing sports or other activities, one would find Tanya Shymko sketching or painting.

The Fort St. John artist has been teaching classes in the community for nearly 17 years, introducing kids and adults to drawing techniques, painting styles and colour theory.

Her own work is steeped in realism, often working off a photo in various mediums. She shows drawings of people and animals, as well as paintings of flowers and nature.

"I think it depends on my mood. Pencil is nice and portable, but lately I've been doing a lot of pen and ink and watercolour or pastel overtop," she said.

"I go through spurts, sometimes it's just oil paint and I'll do five oil paintings, and then I'll get bored of it and move on to something else."

paper and Community Printers and got put through the apprenticeship program through NAIT for graphic design and printing.

"After that, I got married and had a baby and that sort of put things on hold for a while."

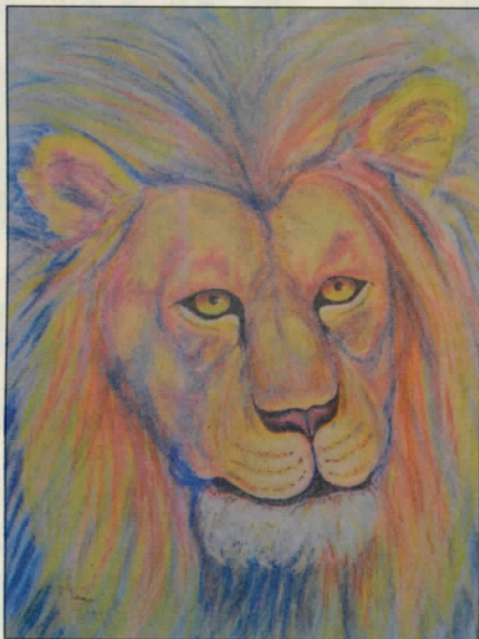
Once she started her family, she moved to Fort St. John. While still wanting to make being an artist financially

viable, she found there was a need for art classes in the community. Thus, she began teaching.

Her classes welcome people of all skill levels, from brand new beginners to those with more experience and knowledge.

"I try to mix it up, we'll do four or five weeks of drawing and then we'll get into a type of paint," she said. "(We'll) start out with a drawing medium—pencil, pen and ink, charcoal—

then move into acrylics or watercolour or oil."



"Untitled", pen and ink/pastels/mixed media  
by Tanya Shymko

Lately, Shymko said she's been working from her imagination and free drawing more spiritual images.

Shymko made her way to the Peace Region from Quesnel after high school when she discovered one could actually get a post secondary education in fine art.

She was accepted to fine arts programs at Grant McEwan College in Edmonton and Northern Lights College in Dawson Creek, deciding on the latter.

"Out of all of the programs, they were more inclusive. They offered more of everything all together," she said.

After completing her two-year program, Shymko chose to stay in the region and pursue a career that would allow her to create and be creative.

"I just wanted a career in art, so I also took graphic design," she said. "I ended up getting a job with the Mirror news-

She noted that there's often someone in the class who has never had any formal art instruction that don't believe they're able to do the projects, but they always seem to discover something about themselves in the process.

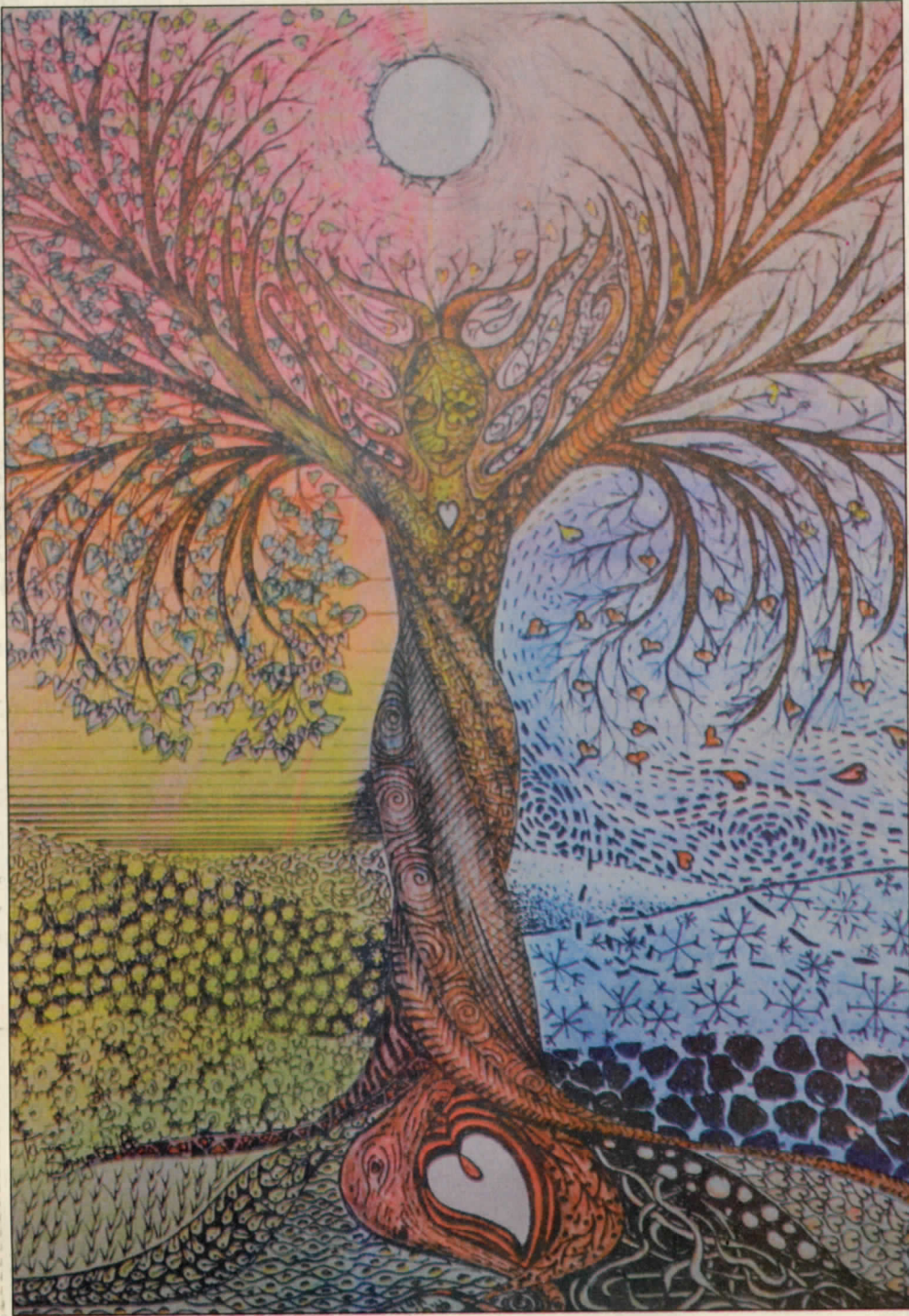
"It'll open their eyes to what they can do. I always get the students that have never taken a class, and they come in and they're really intimidated and then I tell them, 'you'll really be amazed with what you can do' and they never believe it. Then three classes in, they'll be 'I can't believe I've done this!'" she said.

Shymko will be starting up classes again in the fall. For more information, call 250-794-1383.

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*Is there a local artist that you'd like to see featured in the Arts & Culture section? Send an email to [ahendry@ahnfsj.ca](mailto:ahendry@ahnfsj.ca)*





"The Goddess", pen and ink/pastels  
by Tanya Shymko

## CONTACT US

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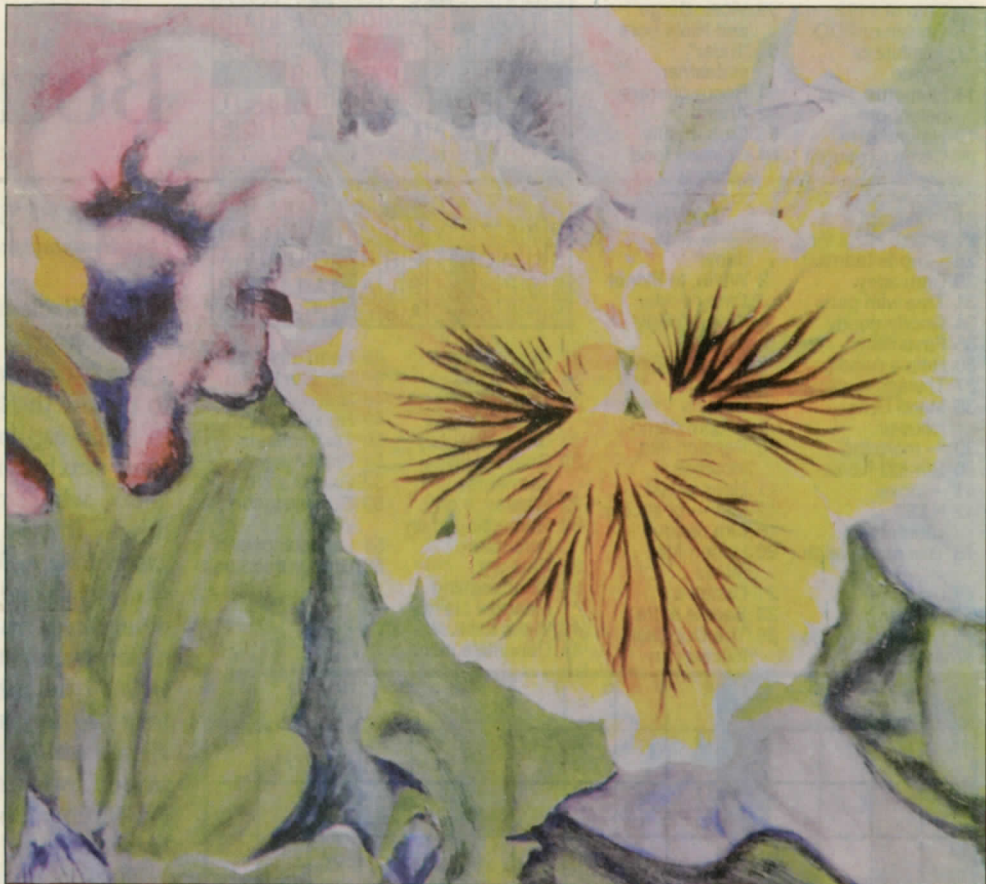
-Tanya Shymko



ALEISHA HENDRY PHOTO

Tanya Shymko is a lifelong artist that uses a variety of mediums for her work. She also teaches kids and adult art classes at the ArtsPost.





"Pansies", acrylics by Tanya Shymko