

# THRIVING SPECTRUM

60 YEARS OF ANNUAL  
JURIED EXHIBITIONS IN  
OXFORD COUNTY



**EXHIBITION RUN**

July 14 to September 8

**GUEST CURATOR**

Peter Flannery

***The juried exhibition provides the artist and the public with exciting opportunities; for the artist the possibility to exhibit in a public art gallery and to submit their work to the scrutiny of established professionals in the art field; for the public, a chance to see the high calibre of art being produced in Oxford County, and by artists who support the gallery.***<sup>1</sup>

– Brenda Wenstob, former Woodstock Art Gallery Curator

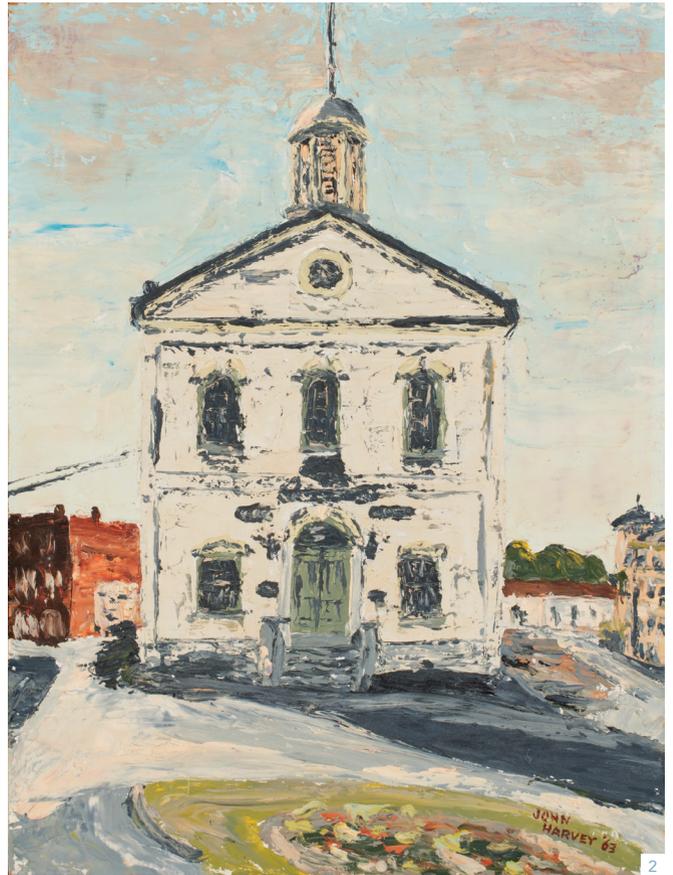
Beginning in 1667, France's official art exhibition, the *Salon*, served as an opportunity for artists to display their works, discuss cultural matters, and come together as an artistic community. Sponsored by the French government, the *Salon* eventually became an annual, juried event that encouraged the development of an artistic community through the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture and helped to establish the importance of French artists. Over the past 350 years, countless other nations and communities have followed a similar course in the encouragement of artistic experimentation and community. Oxford County's own annual juried exhibition, now called *Visual Elements*, is no exception, as can be witnessed through its history of education, community, and creativity over the past sixty years.

Culture and the arts form an integral part of our communities, small and large, producing a wide range of benefits for members of all ages. A 2005 report by the Creative City Network of Canada found that the arts and culture "are a means to public dialogue, contribute to the development of a community's creative learning, create healthy communities capable of action, provide a powerful tool for community mobilization and activism, and help build community capacity and leadership."<sup>2</sup> For sixty years, *Visual Elements* has been a core element of Oxford County's artistic and cultural community which has provided artists and the public with opportunities to witness, experience, and consider artworks and the meanings they hold. Through artistic development and community, Oxford County's juried exhibitions have benefitted not only the artists themselves, but citizens of all ages and backgrounds.

The Oxford County Dilettante Club, a group devoted to the study and encouragement of arts and culture, organized the inaugural annual exhibition in May 1959. Without an art gallery or official group to support local artists and

their work, the Dilettante Club worked along with the Woodstock Little Theatre to develop the exhibition so that local and regional artists could display their work for the public and discuss their artistic productions with their peers. Exceeding anyone's expectations, the show and sale saw the hanging of 212 works by 44 artists. Paintings by artists from across the region filled every available wall space in the Little Theatre rooms and the Badminton Club Lounge. Through the four-day run of the inaugural show and sale, more than 500 visitors viewed the works, including adults of all ages and several school groups of young children.

Given the staggering number of entries as well as visitors to the exhibition, the Dilettante Club and artistic community recognized the need for a group that would encourage artists, allowing them a space in which to come together. In the following weeks, a committee of organizers was put together by the Dilettante Club, which resulted in the formation of the Oxford County Art Association (OCAA) in June of that year. Beyond continuing the annual exhibition, the OCAA endeavoured "to raise the standard of art in the County, to organize classes in several levels [...], to hold lectures for art and for art appreciation to the public, and to promote public interest in the work of County and City artists and painters."<sup>3</sup>





Over the following decades, the OCAA brought numerous Canadian artists to Oxford County to offer classes and lectures, including notable Canadian painter Alex Colville (1920–2013), Group of Seven members A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974) and Lawren Harris (1885–1970), and founder of the Sculptors Society of Canada Frances Loring (1887–1968), while ensuring education and support for arts and culture. Through their work, the artistic community flourished as artists were given forums



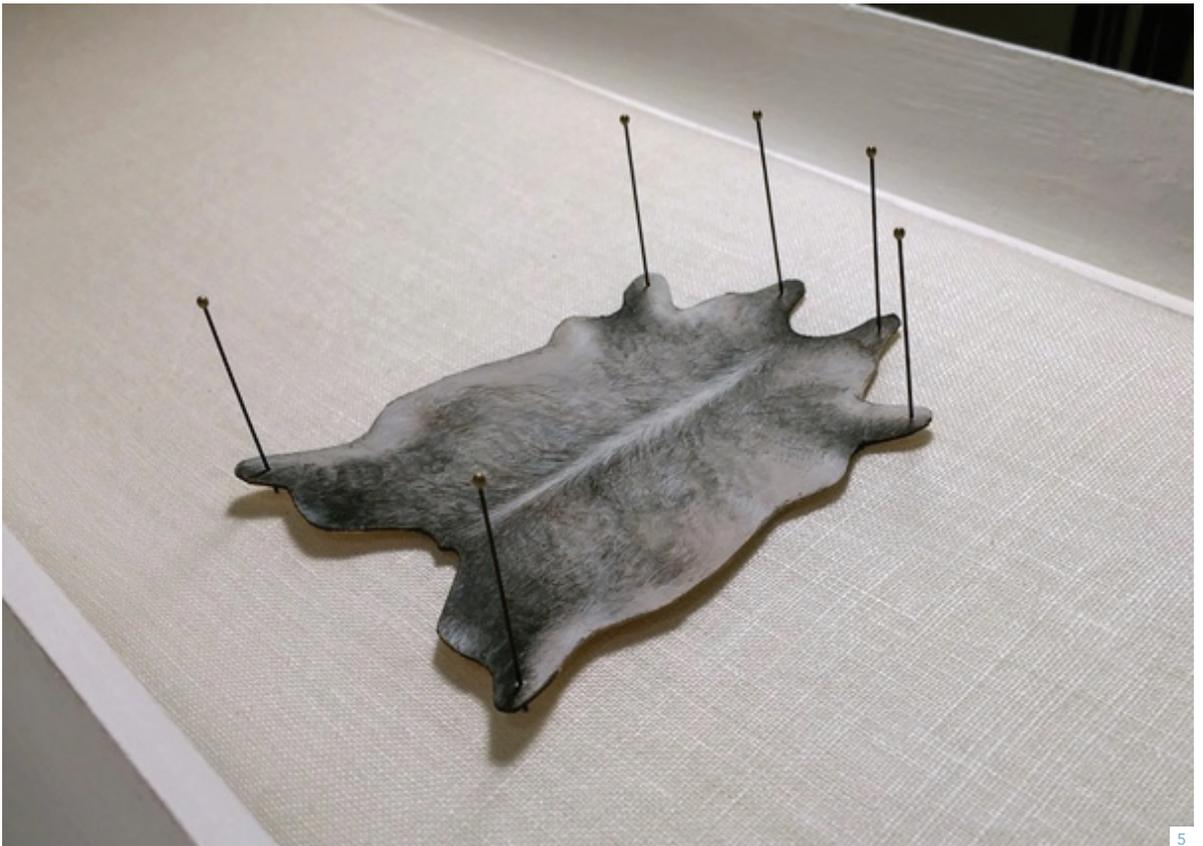
in which to learn, discuss their work, and come together, particularly through the annual exhibition that would remain the cornerstone of the OCAA. Much as the Paris *Salon* and the major exhibitions of other nations and cities around the world have spurred the development of arts, culture, and community, the OCAA's annual exhibition has supported the painters, printmakers, and sculptors of Woodstock, Oxford County, and surrounding areas for the past sixty years.

By the sixth Oxford County exhibition in 1964, the quantity and quality of entries had risen so much that it was deemed necessary to incorporate a jury process, in which artists or other arts professionals would select the best works from the many diverse submissions each year to be exhibited, a practice that continues to this day. The catalogue for the 1964 exhibition states that the incorporation of a jury was further intended "to encourage those whose works are hung, and inspire those whose works are rejected to paint with added vigour and determination, and return again."<sup>4</sup> Painter and curator of the London Regional Art Gallery, now Museum London, Clare Bice (1909–1976) served as the first of many distinguished jurors to participate in selecting works for the exhibition while also providing feedback and support to all those who submitted their work for consideration.

In the years following the formation of the OCAA, its tremendous work supported, educated, and encouraged local and regional artists through the annual exhibition, lectures, and classes to the extent that the local artistic community and the OCAA were instrumental in the formation of the Woodstock Art Gallery (WAG). Supported

by funding from Canada's centennial celebrations and the work of OCAA members, the formation of a gallery in Woodstock, an idea that would have seemed unlikely prior to the Dilettante Club's planning of the inaugural exhibition, became a reality. First located in the basement of the Woodstock Public Library before moving to the manse next door, and now in its home across from Museum Square on Dundas Street, the Gallery has carried the torch of the *Visual Elements Annual Juried Exhibition* for many years.

*Thriving Spectrum: 60 Years of Juried Exhibitions in Oxford County* brings together a group of works created by local and regional artists whose art has been exhibited in at least one of the annual juried exhibitions. Drawn largely from the WAG's permanent collection, the selected works demonstrate the immense breadth of styles, mediums, and themes present within the work produced by these talented local artists. Featuring paintings, drawings, and sculptures by those who have exhibited year after year—individuals who have become longstanding and influential members of our cultural community—the exhibition also includes works by those who began their artistic practice locally and have since carried their skills and talents elsewhere while retaining their Oxford County roots. *Thriving Spectrum* recognizes just a few of the many artists who have worked in Oxford County over the past sixty years and the things that all can achieve through the growth, experience, and community that is supported by the juried exhibition.





Through the annual juried exhibitions, local and regional artists have received crucial support and encouragement to produce their work while, in turn, their efforts have benefitted the entire community of Oxford County for the past sixty years. Exhibited artworks have traced the history of Oxford County, its social and cultural issues, and the lives of those here and abroad, and have demonstrated the strength and creativity of Oxford County residents. Nearly 600 artists have shown their work throughout the juried exhibitions and many more will continue to do so in the years to come, building upon the thriving spectrum of work created by local and regional artists over the past sixty years.

**Peter M. Flannery**

Guest Curator

## END NOTES

- 1 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Oxford County Juried Exhibition (Woodstock: Woodstock Art Gallery, 1990).
- 2 Creative City Network of Canada, *Arts and Positive Change in Communities* (Vancouver: Creative City Network of Canada, 2005), [https://www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/arts\\_positive\\_change\(1\).pdf](https://www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/arts_positive_change(1).pdf).
- 3 Louise Hill, papers, n.d., Oxford County Art Association fonds, Woodstock Art Gallery, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada.
- 4 OCAA 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Art Exhibition and Sale (Woodstock: Woodstock Art Gallery, 1964).

## ILLUSTRATED WORKS

All works: Woodstock Art Gallery Permanent Collection. Dimensions in cm height x width x length.

### Cover Image

Jaquie Poole, *Flat Rock*, 2009. Acrylic on board, 91.5 x 122.3. Photo credit: Rita Taylor.

- 1 Pat Gibson, *Estuary Tracings: The Mix #2*, 2016. Oil on Mylar, 200 x 106. Photo credit: Pat Gibson.
- 2 John Harvey, *The Old City Hall*, 1963. Oil on board, 40.5 x 30.6. Photo credit: Robert McNair.
- 3 Laura Bydlowska, *Ascent*, 2016. Etching, gouache, pyrography on wood panel, 38.5 x 28. Photo credit: Robert McNair.
- 4 Shane Norrie, *Untitled*, 2012. Ceramic, Glass, wire, and tire, 175 x 35 x 132. Photo credit: Rita Taylor.
- 5 Cole Swanson, *Specimen Hide #1*, 2015. Opaque Watercolour on wasli paper, entomology pins, linen and wood, 8.5 x 6. Photo credit: Cole Swanson.
- 6 Lillie Jane Telfer, *My First Painting*, 1961. Oil on canvas board, 30.5 x 40.5. Photo credit: Robert McNair.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Woodstock Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the effort and support of the artists, jurors, and organizers who have contributed to the annual juried exhibition over the past 60 years, and those who continue to do so, without whom these exhibitions and this community would not exist.