



Throughout her life, Vivien Kershaw cottaged in Muskoka. She painted this colourful piece while vacationing at her friend's cottage on Bass Lake in the 1950s.

# Showcasing a legacy

*After a lifetime of painting, Vivien Kershaw's artwork will be viewed at her first and last show*

Story by Melissa Kosowan

**A**fter a lifetime of painting, Vivien Kershaw's art will finally be seen by the public. It will be her first art show, and also her last. Not long after she set aside her modesty and agreed to display her work at a gallery, doctors discovered Kershaw had terminal liver cancer.

"The stakes got a little higher," says Stevie Vallance, Kershaw's niece who is organizing the art show.

The 87-year-old had been given about a year to live, but died on May 22, 2007.

While Kershaw never

lived to see her art show, Vallance hopes her aunt would have been proud.

"I think more than anything it would have made her so happy that her family and friends saw her stuff on the wall. That's why I wanted to do this for her," Vallance says. "I wanted to give her that treat, that thrill of seeing her stuff in a real art gallery."

Kershaw cottaged in Muskoka throughout her life. She had hundreds of oil and acrylic paintings to her credit, but kept them tucked away in her apartment near Toronto.

"I did it for my own interests. I had a job too; I had a civil service job. I mean you have to eat. I kept it as a hobby, more or less. I guess I should have tried for a show before, but well, there we go," explained Kershaw in an interview in April, speaking by phone from her bed in the veterans' wing of the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre where she resided during the final stages of her life.

Kershaw didn't bother to sign her name on many of her paintings either, only jotting notes on the back of the canvas.

"It's the British modesty.

It's not important to be famous," Vallance says of her aunt, who was born in England and served in the Second World War before coming to Canada in 1944. "I said to her why didn't you sign your paintings and she said, 'Well I didn't want to show off. I did them for me'... It was never for money."

But after some coaxing from Vallance, Kershaw agreed to display her art, which will be shown at the Alexandra Luke Gallery in Bracebridge. Dubbed the Red Door, the show runs June 2 to 17 with opening day performances by

Vallance, who is an accomplished jazz singer.

Vallance met Wendy Moses, the owner of the gallery, through a mutual friend and she was smitten as soon as she saw the building tucked away in the woods.

"It's the epitome of what Viv would have liked to have had," Vallance says of the Alexandra Luke Gallery. "When I saw Wendy's setup I got chills all over my body. I didn't know Viv was terminal at that time and all I thought was, I've got to show Viv this, this is exactly what she wants, with the chickens

and the gardens and the dogs, and the whole thing."

The exhibition will feature a wide range of Kershaw's work, including several Muskoka landscapes. Her style is distinctive, reflective of the time she spent under the tutelage of the Group of Seven's Arthur Lismer.

"It's like the Group of Seven's and there is a hint of Emily Carr," Wendy Moses says of Kershaw's work. "Why I liked her work is that it has a little flare of abstract in it. She's taken some of it and put almost like a twist on it and made it a little bit abstract."

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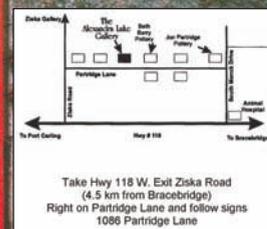
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**The Alexandra Luke Gallery**

Contact Wendy Moses at 705-645-2093



Vivien Kershaw is shown painting outdoors at Hoggs Hollow while studying at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto during the 1950s.

Kershaw was self-taught before she attended the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts where she met Lismer, and fondly remembers her time with the legendary Canadian painter.

"He was a really good teacher, very imaginative. Tremendous," Kershaw said, her voice picking up, as if for that moment she was free from the nausea biting at her stomach. "He said I had similarities to Emily Carr with the rhythms in my work. I

don't know about the colour, but certainly the rhythms."

Kershaw later transferred to the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto to be with her family who immigrated to the city. She graduated from the school in 1950.

While Kershaw is "humble to the point of fault," Vallance is awe-inspired by her work. She considers her aunt to be one of her greatest inspirations.

"She's the only other

artist in my family and I think there's something about her doing it for the love of it and not selling out," says Vallance. "She didn't have kids, she didn't get married, she didn't become a housewife, she was truly a pioneer. So in that sense she inspired me — that came first, putting her art ahead of any kind of normal female roles, especially in the '50s."

Right up until the end, Kershaw hoped she would be able to attend the show.

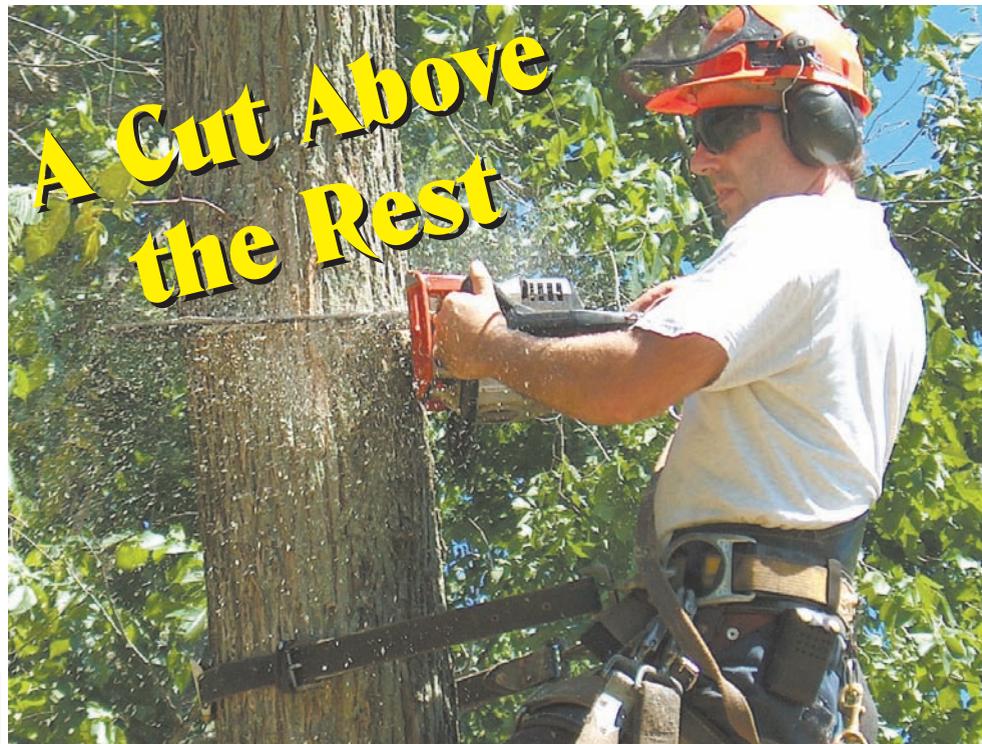
"I'm quite excited about it," she said before her death. "I just hope I'm really fit and well for it. I'm going to try for all I'm worth."

But perhaps she will be there in spirit.

"She had a lot of dreams before she passed away and she saw herself at the show," Vallance says. "She kept imagining it had already happened. Maybe she's going to be there. It was almost like a premonition."



This painting from May of 2006 was Vivien Kershaw's last.



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