

Brigitte Schreyer: Continuing the Artistic Tradition

By Gloria Hildebrandt

PHOTOS BY MIKE DAVIS

Visiting the studio of Brigitte Schreyer is a unique experience. Located in the lower level of her striking home, it is light-filled and warmed by a cheery fire and the sounds of classical music. The art on display glows with beautiful jewel tones, whether depicting flowers, landscapes, views of houses or portraits of people.

Brigitte Schreyer at work on an Arctic watercolour





From the driveway to Studio Brigitte



The Schreyers' house with Studio Brigitte on the lower level



Schreyer's works on display



The Schreyers' living room

Schreyer paints in a representational style in both watercolours and oil. On her desk at the moment is a watercolour of an iceberg. She is in what will surely come to be known as her Arctic period.

"I'm quite involved with Arctic landscapes," she explains. Having been there twice, most recently last July, she is going again this year.

"I'm very much inspired by my Arctic trip."

Schreyer was one of 25 artists who took part in *Arctic Quest*, a two-week voyage by ship through the Arctic to mark the 100th anniversary of Roald Amundsen's 1906 journey through the Northwest passage. The artists distributed art supplies to the remote communities they visited and began their

own work responding to their experiences.

The biggest evidence of Schreyer's inspiration fills one wall of her studio. Entitled "Listen to the Sounds of the Arctic," it's a large triptych of icebergs floating in icy dark water. She tells of sitting with fellow artists in a Zodiac inflatable boat while their guide instructed them to close their eyes and listen.

Brigitte Schreyer

Schreyer points out details in her work as she names the sounds. "I heard water running down this iceberg. Four different birds calling. Ice floes were bumping against our boat. In the distance, the sound of a Zodiac motor. See, here's the Zodiac just going around this iceberg. And there was wind blowing through the icebergs."

She is still creating paintings from her sketches and notes of her last northern journey. "I'm working on Arctic landscapes," she states simply. "This is my life now."

What interests her about her Arctic work is the contrast with her earlier paintings. "With watercolours, the subject matter can be very detailed," she explains. "With oil I can be bolder. I use bigger brushes, bigger canvases. There's less fine detail. I love the cool, big ice masses. The minimal shapes."

And while the Arctic subjects have a cool colour palette, it's surprising how much colour Schreyer observed in the Arctic. Her works contain whites and blues, but also browns, greens and even touches of purple and pink.

Schreyer's artistic talent may have been inherited. Her father was a good amateur oil painter, judging by some of his small landscape canvases that she keeps on display.

"He would hike and sketch," she says. "I would see him paint all the time. And I was always good at art in school. My paintings and sketches would be hung on the wall."

It wasn't until she moved from Germany to Canada that she really began exploring her artistic abilities. Since 1978 she's taught watercolour painting, something she still does in workshops through the year.

Her teaching schedule is on her Web site at www.BrigitteSchreyer.com and the workshops are often held in Lowville United Church. She advises that her workshops are not for rank beginners. People will get more out of them if they've taken a beginner's workshop first. By sharing her own artistic techniques, she's continuing the artistic tradition of her father.



Bateman's eagle sketch on the wall



The indoor garden in the dining room

After showing the many canvases downstairs, Schreyer leads the way upstairs. The house makes a big impact with its open spaces framed by dark wood, with large picture windows showing forest and lawn rolling down to trees. In the distance, on the horizon, is the distinctive shape of the Niagara Escarpment's Rattlesnake Point.

Above the timber-mantelled fireplace hangs another Arctic work for sale, depicting part of Baffin Island. The living room invites lounging in the comfortable sofas while snow falls beyond the window.

Yet there's more to see in this beautiful house. Beyond the central staircase which has railings made from branches found on the property, is a little den with colourful bot-

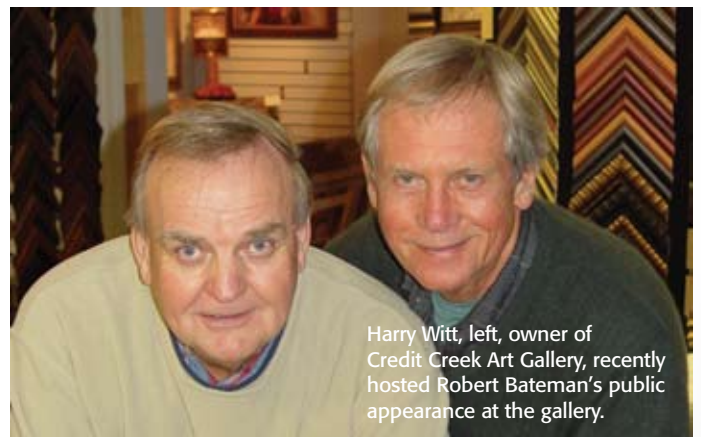
tlles lining the window and a painting of Schreyer's daughter on the wall.

On the opposite wall is what must be the most expensive original sketch in the world by Robert Bateman, the renowned nature art-



Colourful glass and a favourite painting

ist. To own it, you would have to buy the house, because it's drawn right on the wall. Bateman drew it while talking on the phone when he lived in this house after designing and building it.



Harry Witt, left, owner of Credit Creek Art Gallery, recently hosted Robert Bateman's public appearance at the gallery.



"Listen to the Sounds of the Arctic" on the wall of Schreyer's studio

Brigitte and her husband Klaus met Robert Bateman in 1985. "I had no idea that one year later I would buy his house," she says.

One day about 21 years ago, Brigitte and Klaus were out for a

drive. They saw a sign announcing 10 acres for sale and enquired. When Brigitte found out that Bateman owned the property, she became curious about seeing it.

"I was smitten by the house

and scenery," she remembers. "I just loved it."

"You can see the Japanese and African influences in the house," points out Klaus, a design and food service consultant. "It also looks a bit like a chalet."

Bateman told Brigitte that he hoped his house would belong to another artist. Since moving in many years ago, the Schreyers have had little need to renovate.

"Structurally, it's unchanged," says Brigitte. "We love the atmosphere."

The eagle sketch on the wall is the seed of the Bateman painting entitled "Vigilance," which Schreyer enjoys explaining to visitors. Schreyer's daughter asked Bateman to autograph the wall

on one of his visits to his former home, which he did. Now when the Schreyers repaint the walls, they leave the sketch untouched.

Art is displayed everywhere through the house. Some are Schreyer's works that aren't for sale: one of Klaus reclining with a hat over his eyes, portraits of their children and friends, a pet cat... An interior hallway is hung floor to ceiling with the works of other artists.

Family aside, "The best thing in my life was buying the house," Schreyer declares. "Every season is gorgeous. There's something different every day. The grounds are inspiring."

In the house that Bateman built on Mount Nemo, the artistic tradition continues. ■



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