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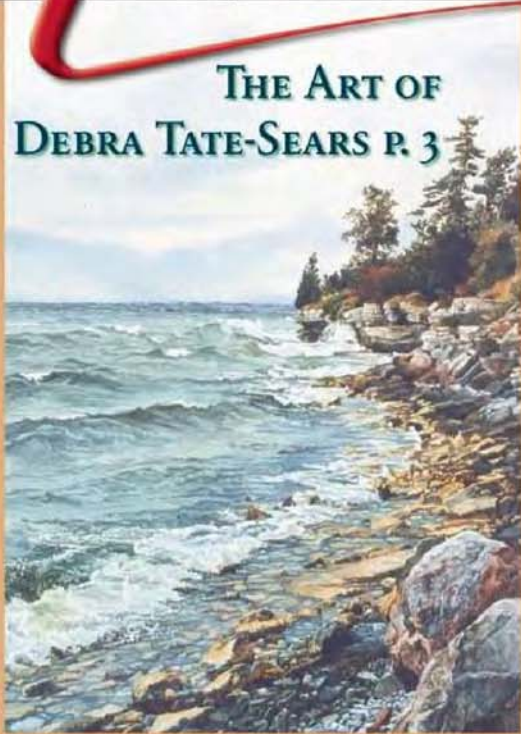
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Debra Tate-Sears: Untouched by Time

From her first exposure to the 18th century artworks of the British Romanticists, watercolourist Debra Tate-Sears has been addicted. Almost thirty years later, her unique Canadian interpretation of this artistic movement remains as passionate and evocative as when she began her studies of art history at Carle-

by Sally Hansen

ton University. Her themes have varied over the decades, but her accomplished rendering of the dramatic effects of natural light is the constant that distinguishes her substantial body of work.

Throughout her career this prolific painter has mastered the unpredictable nature of her chosen watercolour medium with a meticulous, self-taught technique. She has developed a signature palette based on variations on the primary colours. Starting her paintings with pale

masking out, no 'Chinese White' or body colour, nothing but pure transparent watercolour and an obsessive attention to detail."

The results are gorgeous. Her ability to convey mood is extraordinary. Her exploration of her fascination with light through her transparent medium creates atmosphere that transports her viewers into her aesthetic experience. It is magical. It is "emotional."

Sing a Song

Like her Romantic muses, John Sell Cotman, Thomas Girtin, John Constable and J. M. W. Turner, Tate-Sears espouses the fundamental underpinning of "emotionalism," defined by the ArtLex Art Dictionary <www.artlex.com> as "an aesthetic and critical theory of art which places emphasis on the expressive qualities. According to this theory, the most important thing about a work of art is the vivid communication of

Untouched by Time

The Romantic interpretation of landscape, sky, weather, place, architecture, events and the pastoral and picturesque remains as popular today as it became in the 19th century. On September 9, 2005, BBC Radio in conjunction with the National Gallery of Great Britain announced that the British public had chosen an 1838 painting by J. M. W. Turner as the winner of their "Greatest Painting in Britain" Poll. Right behind Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* in second place was *The Hay Wain* by John Constable, finished in 1821. Debra Tate-Sears isn't alone in her ongoing love of the past.

The Picturesque and the Pastoral

Debra's art is strongly influenced by her upbringing in Tweed, a small farming community in southeastern Ontario. Born into a family of educators, she grew up in a very supportive, positive environment. Her grandfather was a hobby painter in addition to being a teacher and writer. As a member of the small Toronto arts community in the 1920s and '30s, he played host to Fred Varley and Arthur Lismer when they sketched and painted at his summer cottage.

Having met "lots of struggling artists," when she left home to attend Carleton University, Debra signed up for English and Journalism. The exposure to Romanticism was seminal, however, and after obtaining her BA in Art History, she returned to Tweed and worked for a commercial gallery. Her first solo exhibit was at the Belleville Public Library in 1982, and she participated in arts festivals across the province during the '80s. She moved with her husband



washes, she builds upon transparent layers to create the desired intensity and detail. Her technique requires an exceptional ability to visualize and manage negative space. Debra describes it as "No tricks, no

moods, feelings, and ideas." "I think we're all looking for a song to sing," Debra responds to my traditional Artist Trading Card query 'why do you paint?' "This is my voice; this is how I express myself."



and two children to Kingston in 1997.

On <www.debratatesears.com>, her beautifully executed website, a click on Galleries followed by a click on Pastoral takes you to Debra's explanation of her fascination with the Canadian landscape. You can also luxuriate in the individual atmospheres created by 26 of her lush interpretations of familiar rural Southern Ontario scenes. You can feel the seasons change and sense the heaviness of the summer air and the crispness of the winter cold.

The strange, natural light that suffused downtown Kingston during the power outage caused by the Ice Storm of 1998 had a direct influence on Tate-Sears' art. Witnessing the "terrible beauty in the fractured forms of the ravaged trees" led her to move gradually away from the pastoral to a higher level of emotionalism, especially in her creation of atmosphere. Her Twilight Series Gallery illustrates the direction her more recent work has taken — a romantic interpretation of the older residential cores of towns and small cities throughout Southern Ontario. Many of these newer works feature architectural compositions that are brooding and almost forbidding, but strangely inviting.

Her website explains that "This theme ties in with the connection she makes in her work, both technically and theoretically, to "Romanticism"; and the attempts made by new Canadians, establishing communities in the mid-nineteenth century, to repli-

cate 'home,' evidenced by the enduring influence of British High Victorian architectural styles." Paintings bear enticing names such as *Carriageway*, *Belfries & Chimneys*, *Kingston Twilight* and *Evensong*.

The Spider's Parlour

Debra welcomes guests to drop in at her aptly named home studio/gallery where the coffee is already on, and she is always ready to spin a yarn or two about her work. Located at 1020 Spring Mill Lane in Perth Road Village about 20 km north of Kingston, it is a lovely venue to meet her and enjoy her work. On October 16 and 17 she is hosting a studio open house entitled "As the Crow Flies" with guest sculptor Mary Sullivan.

The Rideau Valley Art Festival in Westport from August 27–29 affords an earlier opportunity, and on Labour Day Weekend (September 4–6) Tate-Sears is participating in the Sundance Studio Walking Tour in Maberly. She is very excited about her huge solo show scheduled at Campbell House Museum at 160 Queen St. W. in downtown Toronto during November and December. Campbell House is the oldest remaining house from the original Town of York, built in 1822 by Judge William Campbell and his wife, and one of the few surviving examples of Georgian architecture left in Toronto. Debra can be reached by email at <debratatesears@gmail.com>, or by phone at 353-7302.

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