

IN GRAND STYLE

Wendy Fletcher, president and vice-chancellor at Renison University College, wears two of the colourful scarves she has created based on her original paintings.

PHOTO BY DECLAN OUTHIT



Fletcher's art fuels her philanthropy

“Beauty will save the world,” wrote Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Artist and scholar Wendy Fletcher agrees, and so she’s sending her art into the world to see what happens.

Fletcher is president and vice-chancellor of Renison University College. It’s a demanding job that keeps her busy building international partnerships, developing programs and recruiting students.

Art helps balance her life. Her latest artistic project transfers her vibrant images from canvas to fabric, creating dramatic scarves in long shapes and infinity styles. Her next goal is to create home décor items, such as pillowcases.

Fletcher loved to paint when she was younger, but she drifted away from it while raising three children and building an academic career that made her a professor, dean, vice-principal and principal at the Vancouver School of Theology. She was



Lynn Haddrall

also a professor at Huron University College at Western University for more than 10 years. An Anglican priest, she’s proud of her relations with First Nation communities. Two have adopted her and honoured her with aboriginal names.

Eventually, Fletcher found herself at a crossroads, wondering about the next stage of her life. Her teenage son, Joshua, suggested to his sisters, Rachel and Anna, that mom needed a special Christmas gift. They gave her a small easel box with acrylic paint and brushes.

This puzzled Fletcher at first. “I hadn’t had a paint brush in my hand, other than their paint brushes, for decades,” she recalls. But

then the power of the gift hit her.

“I opened up the box and pulled out the paint brush. The moment I felt the brush in my hand I knew I had found a way, a path, through all of the questions and complexities that I was exploring and struggling with.”

Fletcher began to paint again. It was an emotional personal journey.

“When I first started them, the paintings were darker. They had more reds, they had black, but as I painted all of that, the darker stuff came up and out. What came after that was colour,” Fletcher says. She found herself drawn to the bold colours and strong messages of the German expressionism movement.

“They are a very brief genre within the cornucopia of modern art. They painted between the First and Second World Wars. Some of them were very much into social commentary. My favourite painter is Emil Nolde. He’s all about the colour. He uses

colour to communicate and that’s what the expressionists did. They played with colour – how you can use colour to shock and surprise, how you could use colour to elicit an emotional response, how you can use colour to communicate something that words have failed to communicate.”

Fletcher was fascinated as she watched people respond to her work, sometimes seeing what she tried to communicate and sometimes seeing something different.

“Then a whole new direction developed in terms of my painting. I started to paint concepts and ideas – partnership, healing, reconciliation, love, courage, forgiveness, balance, moderation.”

Philanthropy is important to Fletcher. Over the years, she has donated her art generously for fundraisers. Her donated pieces raised \$21,000 for a network of groups helping homeless people in Vancouver.

Fletcher’s art has also supported University

of Waterloo fundraising. A recent exhibition to celebrate the school’s 60th anniversary was auctioned at an alumni gala to raise money for bursaries for students from Hong Kong. Fletcher travelled to Hong Kong with the Beautiful U: Waterloo exhibition. It features large canvasses with a different colour theme for the university and each college and faculty. Symbols in each painting reflect the work in each faculty and college.

“It is my experience that you cannot paint something with which you have no relationship,” Fletcher wrote about the exhibition. “Embedded in each painting are a variety of symbols which the viewer should read through the lens of their own experience of the discipline areas, in conversation with the artist’s lens – the story which is embedded in the paintings.”

Conversations are at the heart of Fletcher’s art.

“It’s still a conversation with myself. That’s the first thing it is, always. But what I’ve learned about my art is that it has become a communication with the world. It’s become a way to communicate with people who are around me and far from me,” Fletcher explains.

Some of those conversations occur in the Milton office of her husband, Superior Court Judge Michael Gibson. A courthouse has an institutional feel, but Fletcher’s paintings brighten his chamber walls. “It’s become this place where everybody just gravitates. They talk about how the art speaks to them,” says Fletcher. “The art gives peace, gives tranquility, gives hope. It has a calming effect.”

Fletcher’s latest personal venture extends her artistic conversation. Over the years she has sold her art, and last year she incorporated her own business, Wendy Fletcher Originals. Her daughters help with the

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'Emergence' is an example of the original art created by Wendy Fletcher.

PHOTO BY DECLAN OUTHIT

be something different.”

Fletcher experienced that reaction when interviewed recently by university students for a school project. “I’ve absolutely loved it because all of these groups of young people have been coming and telling me what they think the paintings mean and then asking me what I actually meant. ‘What does this mean and why did you use this colour?’ ”


Colour is interpreted differently around the world. Fletcher points to Korea where pale yellow and pink are masculine colours; Korean students would get different messages from the use of pale blues and pinks in western culture. She’s also intrigued by the students’ generational reaction to her work.

“They come from a totally different generation, which means the symbol system and even the meaning of colours is not the same for them. For example, they will see symbols that are like emoticon symbols, which I don’t intend. I think the application of the emoticon to the symbol system is one of the more interesting things.”

Fletcher looks forward to her images sparking more discussions. Who knows the conversations that might grow out of the beauty she creates?

“I know it sounds silly to connect that to the scarves but when I do my art, it’s like a piece of me goes into the art,” she says. “It is an open-ended conversation with the world.”

Can beauty truly save the world?

“To be quite honest, I believe that. I know we need food, I know we need structures, I know we need to fight the man and all that, but it’s not really my piece. In the end, my piece is wanting to contribute something beautiful to the world.” 

On the web:

www.wendylfletcher.com

website (wendylfletcher.com) and transfer Fletcher’s art from canvas to scarves.

The scarves feature a portion of each painting and are produced in small batches. Fletcher experimented with synthetic materials, but settled on natural fabrics such as silk charmeuse, cotton voile and silk habotai.

“These are big scarves. We don’t do little scarves. What’s the point of a little scarf,” Fletcher says with a laugh. “We make them long so you can double-, triple-tie them. That’s a big piece of silk. We don’t do a large markup on them so you can actually afford to wrap yourself in original silk. The ordinary woman can feel like she is a queen.”

It’s important to Fletcher that she maintains a conversation with the person

viewing or wearing her art.

“The thing I like about art is that it lives after humans die, so if it can live on and continue to have that conversation with the world, I will feel deeply fulfilled.”

Fletcher sees her latest project as an extension of that hope.

“The scarves can go so many more places in the world than the paintings on the wall can.”

As each scarf travels, it carries the message Fletcher conceived when she created the image, plus the interpretations of the people who wear it and those who see it.

“The silly thing about the art that then becomes the fabric is that everything is laden with some intended meaning, which the viewer will say, ‘Oh, it’s a flower,’ but if you were to ask me what it means, it might



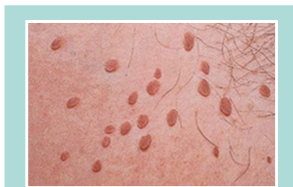
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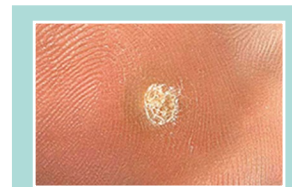
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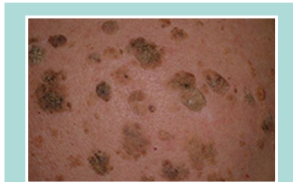
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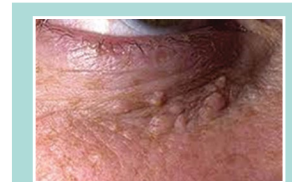
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