

**midwest
nature:**



**its
beauty
and its peril**

***midwest nature:
its beauty and its peril***

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Midwest Nature – Its Beauty and Its Peril

“Midwest Nature – Its Beauty and Its Peril” is an art exhibition presented by the Women’s Caucus for Art, complementing the beauty and natural environment of the Mayslake Peabody Estate in Oak Brook, IL. The intent was to include art that explores the splendor of regional nature scenes in a variety of styles and media: abstract, representational, two-dimensional, and three-dimensional.

Artworks express the beauty of nature in the Midwest—literally, abstractly, and metaphorically—and ask the question: “How are we connected to the nature around us?”

Selected works range from manicured gardens to prairie grasses and native flowers, to the water and sky above. Some convey concerns about negative effects of extreme environmental issues.

The intimacy and delicacy of nature contrast with the possibility of storms or natural disasters. Some artworks are bold, even slightly menacing—a reminder that imperfection can be both beautiful and perilous. Several artists address the assault of discarded plastics on our environment in the Midwest and the world at large. The works are shaped by nature, humanity’s interaction with it, and our impact on the natural world.

Many of the pieces exude beauty, thought, and contemplation—while others add a note of humor, a necessary element in this time of growing environmental concern in our state, our Midwest region, our nation, and across the globe.

The historic Mayslake Peabody Estate, surrounded by natural beauty, is a fitting setting for this compelling and visually rich exhibition.

– Curators: Anne Farley Gaines, Bert Leveille, and Jeane Kat McGrail

Many thanks to Dennis Buck, Heritage Interpretation & Collections Supervisor
Community Engagement-Mayslake Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, for facilitating
the CWCA art exhibition “midwest nature, its beauty and its peril”
and **to all at Mayslake Peabody Estate**, who helped make this a successful and
beautiful exhibition at the Mayslake Peabody Estate, 1717 31st St, Oak Brook, IL 60523
from June 9 – July 26 2025

Thank you to all the participating artists.

Thank you to Constance Volk, the flutist for the “midwest nature, its beauty and
its peril” exhibition reception.

Thank you to all who donated to make this catalog a reality – Arlene Rakoncay,
Diane Rickert, Kevin Munday, Andrea Munday, Deb Anderson, Carolyn Sommer, Karen Sugay,
Alan Johnson, Charlene Moy.

And, **thank you to the entire CWCA board and member volunteers** for their
untiring dedication to women artists.

Exhibition Title: Anne Farley Gaines
Co-curators and Exhibition Committee: Anne Farley Gaines, Bert Leveille, Jeane Kat McGrail
Logo, Poster and Catalog Design: Bert Leveille
Logo Illustration: Anne Farley Gaines
Statement/Bio Gallery Book: Anne Farley Gaines
Sign-In Book Design and Production: Jeane Kat McGrail
Catalog Editing, Coordination and Proofing: Anne Farley Gaines, Bert Leveille, Jeane Kat McGrail

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committee, curators, organizers, or venue. The exhibition and this publication are committed to maintaining an
inclusive, respectful space for artistic exploration and dialogue.”*

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Tobi Star Abrams



Prehistoric Midwest, 16x20in, 3-D painting

reflects my love of nature and the excitement it creates

Deb Anderson



Sumac, 36x48in, oil on canvas

explore *Midwestern flora and the beauty, pattern, depth and chaos of layered walls of foliage.*

Sandie Bacon



Where the Frogs Sing and Bugs, bugs bugs, 14in dia ea, acrylic on shaped paper

*Fields and flowers, amber grains, and endless flora and fauna in fields, plains and lakes, these painted bowls incorporate **actual plants and silhouettes of flora***

Denise Bellezzo



REVIVAL, 20x15in, powdered pigment, ink

repeat patterns combined with observational drawing.

Peter Bialecki



And the Birds are Singing, 60x48in, oil on burlap

...the **beauty of the forest and the prairie** creating an abundance of color and texture.

Jules Briggs



Iceboat in Michigan, 14inx10inx.5in, acrylic on canvas

*Iceboat that **fell through ice** on the lake.*

Debbie Caruso



Beauty & Peril, 20x14x8in, bronze, iron, flowers, faux flowers, semi precious stones

*All flowers are beautiful and the state **flowers for the midwest are no exception..***

Laura Cerf-Dahl



What would Chicago be without Lake Michigan?

Frequent walks

along the lakefront inspired my series of paintings based on the sky and the lake.

Sky Lake 3, 60x36in, oil on canvas

Anna Marie Crovetti



Petite Path, 18x18in, watercolor and pastel on arches paper

Kenny Cunny



A Train Don't Run on Tore-Up Track, 20x14x1in, acrylic paint, Asian paper, wood, molding paste, metal screen material

This work, 'A Train Don't Run on Tore-Up Track' is based upon a colloquialism about life being impossible if one doesn't run one's life on solid footing and is kind of 'all over the place.' I applied this to the extremes in our climate and our environment being disharmonious in the midwest in particular because of adverse conditions caused by human neglect, like allowing fuel emissions to pollute the environment. Global warming is one of the results of this carelessness over time, like the rising waters in the Lakes.

Helen Dannelly



Lavender Water Lily, 18x24in, oil on canvas

***inspired** by the Chicago Botanic Garden lily pond*

Lorette Dodt



Red Trillium, 20x24in, photo on photographic paper

*photographed in the Midwest, specifically in Trout Valley. ...in a fen, where there is an **abundance of wildflowers** that are found in the spring.*

Heather Donovan



Fiery Sunflower, 12x16in, acrylic and modeling paste on canvas board

*Sunflowers are native to the Midwest and **represent the beauty and resiliency of the Midwest.***

Joanne Farrell



Chicago Meditation Garden, Millennium Park, 14x18in, mixed-media on canvas using acrylic and markers

*I enjoy depicting scenes of Chicago using a loose, flowing, and Impressionistic approach, particularly to the subject of **parks and gardens.***

Lynn Floriano



*Earth Pin, 6in, cloisonné enamel,
fine silver,
repousse silver leaf, found glass*



*I Feel Sorry for the Flower(1), 8x8x2in, enamel, silver, rusted
steel, brass, tree bark, and natural objects.*

reminiscent of the elegant forms of nature; seeds, birds, trees, rocks and shells that to me, have spiritual and abstract qualities... The work is narrative. Looking, seeing, holding the tiniest seed or leaf reminds me of a beautiful world.

Emily F Friel



Light Patterns - Prairie Lights, 16.5x16.5, pastel on paper

*I study light patterns and how patterns of light are expressed in nature.
Here the **setting sun lights the prairie and sets the prairie to glow and flow.***

Victoria Fuller

I depict multilayer investigations of environmental systems, organic and manmade structures, illustrating both nature's abundance and the dire consequences of human interference.



top: Magnolia Pod, 16x12in, watercolor
bottom: Lily Pollen, 26x15x10in, epoxy clay, magnets, and acrylic

Anne Farley Gaines



***disturbed
by climate
change and
its effect
abroad
and in the
U.S.***

*I see it
in the Midwest
environment I
live in...— the
rising waters of
Lakes Superior,
Huron and
Michigan that
compromise the
roots of trees
so badly that
they tip over
and eventually
fall. ...neglect
of nature's
beauty along
the shoreline.*

***... positive
action can
change
these
affects for
the better.***



top: *Hope and Refuse*, 16x20 x1in, mixed-media: acrylic paint,
Asian papers, matte medium, rice paste, and natural materials
bottom: *St. Ignace Shoreline*, 36inx30in framed, watercolor

Lourdes S Guerrero

*For twenty
years and
every
season,
**I walk
in the
woods**
of
southwest
Michigan,
**looking
for
hidden
gems.**
For the
first time
ever, I
spotted a
Jack-in-a
Pulpit.*



Jack-in-the-Pulpit, 20x16in framed (14x11in print), digital print

John Hatlestad



A Rock A Stick And A Joke, 20x20x10in, invasive species plant, birch limbs, 'found' ebony shapes, sand-blasted glass

*I use such **disparate materials** in my found objects sculptures ... **wood and other natural materials found in the Midwest***

Jeanine Hill-Soldner

*I find water
to be calming
and soothing.
My painting
of the
waterfall at
Starved Rock
reflects the
cool greens
of the forest
and **bright
sunlight
streaming
through
and
dancing
on the
water's
surface.***

*This is a
beautiful
natural
feature of
the Midwest
landscape..*



Calming Waters, 36x24x1.5in, oil on canvas

Alan Johnson



Triumph of nature, 9x12in, watercolor paper with watercolor

Nature is patient and opportunistic willing to take on the challenge of promoting life.

Diane Johnson



Midwest Prairie Grass, 13x11in, Oil

Kendra Kett



Leaf Glow Duet, 18x14 framed (13x10 unframed),
watercolor pencils, colored pencils, acrylic, micron
pens, metallic pens



Leaf Glow Triplet, 18x14 framed (13x10 unframed),
watercolor pencils, colored pencils, acrylic, micron pens,
metallic pens

I'm always drawn to leaves. As a youngster I relished **exploring fields & wetlands** around our home collecting colorful leaves to press into books. I loved the thrill of the hunt & that feeling of a **calm centered aloneness that the quiet open spaces** of my youth provided. My Leaf Glow works attempt to share the **healing aura of leaf architecture** while also offering a subtle nod to the idea of medicinal patches. A patch stitches something up & covers a wound, gap or hole. Leaves are patches for me, **steadfast in a chaotic world.**

Pauline Kochanski

*I find exploring the **sensuous shapes of line and shadow** brings me closer to **nature**. My process is often organic; when I find a branch, twig, seedpod or a stone or even see a mushroom on a log, it leads to a creation. My intention in portraying these elements is to **connect myself to the world**, to find the piece of nature that lives within me. My intention is for the **viewer to find their own path and space** in the art.*



when nature gives itself up, 30x13x7in, tree branch, vellum & ink, twine

Kim Laurel



My work investigates symbolic forms and shapes. I utilize icons and totems with engaging sociological significance.

Primal experiences, nature and personal identity for example, so basic to our understanding of existence, are symbolized in this private world.

Queen Bee Dress, 12x18in, tetrapak plate drypoint monograph

Bert Leveille

**examining
our
connections
to the earth,**

*each other, and
consciousness;
with waterfalls
acting as portals
for mindful
beings who travel
these waterfalls
familiar to us
in the midwest,
connected to
waterfalls around
the world and
to the universe.*

**Water is
essential
to life.**

*A steady drip can
create a canyon.*

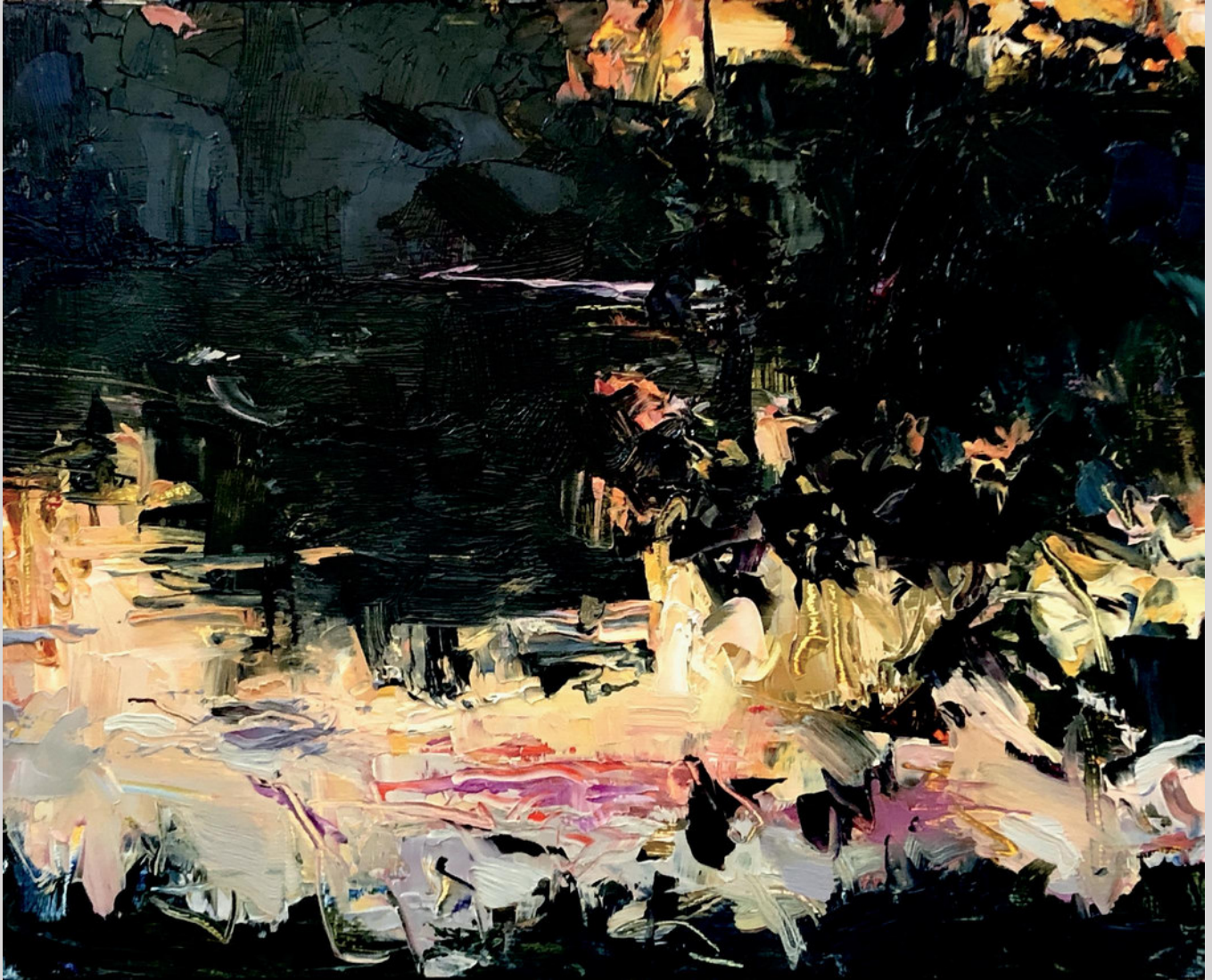
*One persons
awakening can
send a stream of
enlightenment
into the Universe.*

*We search the
universe for
water and for
consciousness.*



Waterfall, installation, acrylic on scrim, mobiles, synchronized LED lighting, video

Duncan Martin



Waiting, 8x10in, Oil on panel

*The light and the land at the confluence of the Illinois and the Mississippi is fertile, **fecund with images, redolent with poignant beauty – a kind of primitive grace.** My experience painting on location in Calhoun County as an art student, and later as an art professor, informed the heart of my work as an artist, engaging with our earth through paint. This painting, “Waiting”, came from such a moment - glimpsed while waiting for a rural ferry on a June evening in 2020 – a glance which embodies in paint so much more than a sunset through the trees above a Mississippi river slough.*

Angela McElwain

The landscapes
are abstractions
of real places
in DuPage
County painted
from memory.

The work
represents
the **fragility**
and
dynamics
of nature.

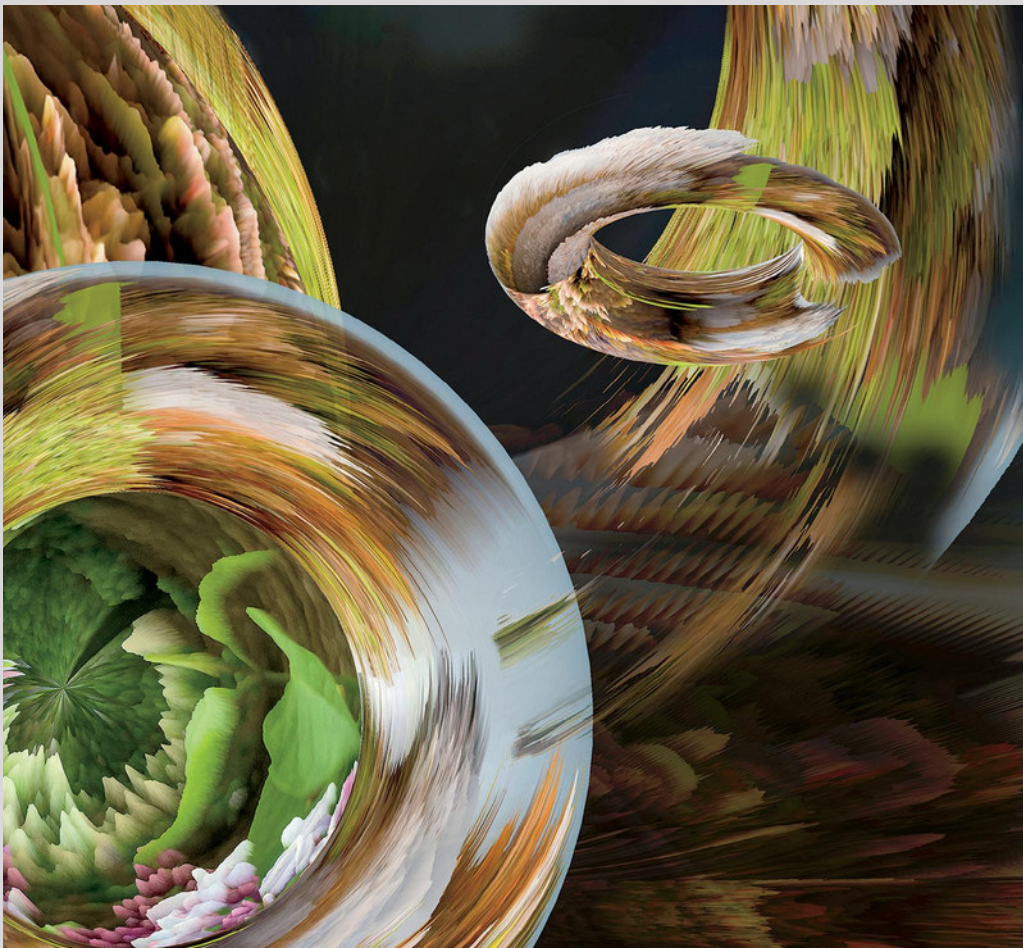
'Scooter's
Lagoon' is an
abstraction
of a lagoon
which was,
during his life,
a **favorite**
place of a
dear friend
of mine
whose
ashes
are now
integrated
with that
place.

The image
expresses a
calm repose.



Scooter's Lagoon, 30x24in, oil on canvas

Jeane Kat McGrail



top: *NUANCES: Infinity Spheres*, diptych 24x72in, environmental digital photographic media dye sub on Chromaluxe external metal
bottom: detail

*The first piece captures my seasonal journeys into nature—observing change, documenting, and reflecting. Like a river, the inquiry shifts, revealing the past and shaping what’s ahead. The second image transforms the first: a vibrant, spherical regeneration. **Not desolation, but explosive renewal**—flowers, insects, birds, and life flowing from rivers, prairies, and wetlands—offering hope, balance, and healing in the face of uncertainty.*

Diane McKeever



Sun and Shadow, 22x30in, acrylic on canvas

capture the play of light and shadows in the landscape, and how it conveys a mood. The light brought out the contrasts between the living forest and the dead birches, that were killed by the effects of the climate change and pests. Yet, the effect creates a beautiful but stark landscape on a northern Wisconsin lake.

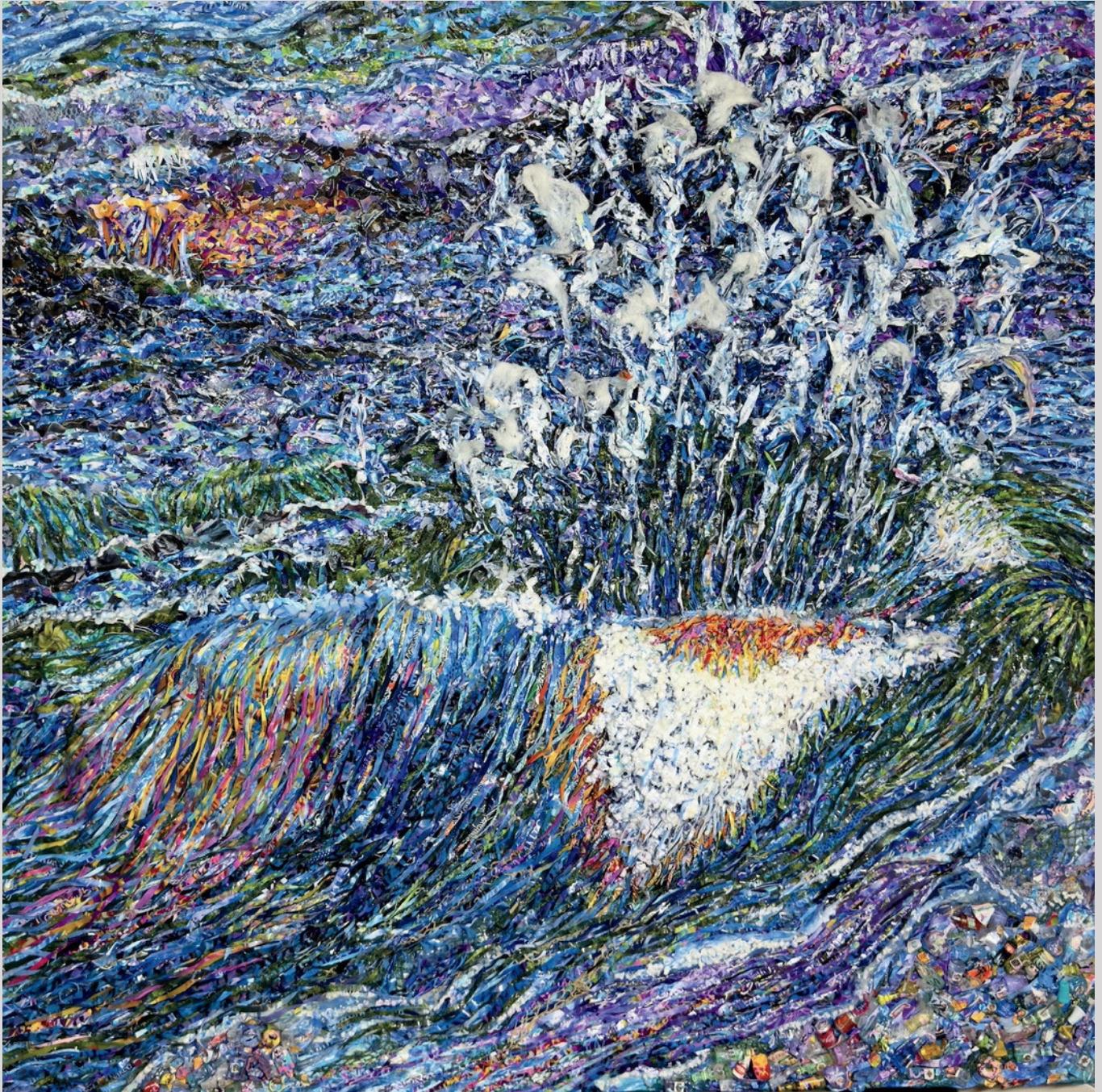
Mildred Annani Mercado



The Buzz of Bees, 13x10in, framed, kuretake Japanese watercolor on handmade paper

The midwest is beautiful yet this **beauty can also hide its perilousness**. Every year more and more of our **pollinators risk extinction** due to many factors, including our farming techniques and our use of chemical pesticides that slowly contaminate the very foods we are trying to protect. In *The Buzz of Bees*, I wanted to show how bees are present in our everyday, they pollinate our native wild flowers, fruits, and vegetables. **Einstein predicted that the human race would disappear in just 7 years if bees become instinct.**

Charlene Moy



Keep Out of the Water, 36x36x1.5, mixed: plastic, styrofoam, 'cotton' from pill bottles, watercolors, dollhouse beverages

Saving the plastic that wraps and holds our food, household necessities and luxuries, I manipulate and unite them with materials from my studio into images inspired by nature.

*I examine the **fleeting beauty of our natural world through traditional mediums and unconventional materials that are harmful to our biosphere.** Cutting, stretching, painting, I assemble & weave plastic and one use items. My intention is to bring attention to the havoc plastic is inflicting on us.*

Anne Nordhaus-Bike



Backyard Bunny In Grass, Autumn, 18.75x19.25in, framed, watercolor on yellow mango paper

*The Midwestern landscape inspires, with its essential flatness that highlights the horizon and an earthly sense of the eternal. In this unique natural setting, the land's water bodies, plants, and animals testify to strength, even in the face of human-created challenges, and continue to **delight the senses and the soul.***

Geoffrey Novelli

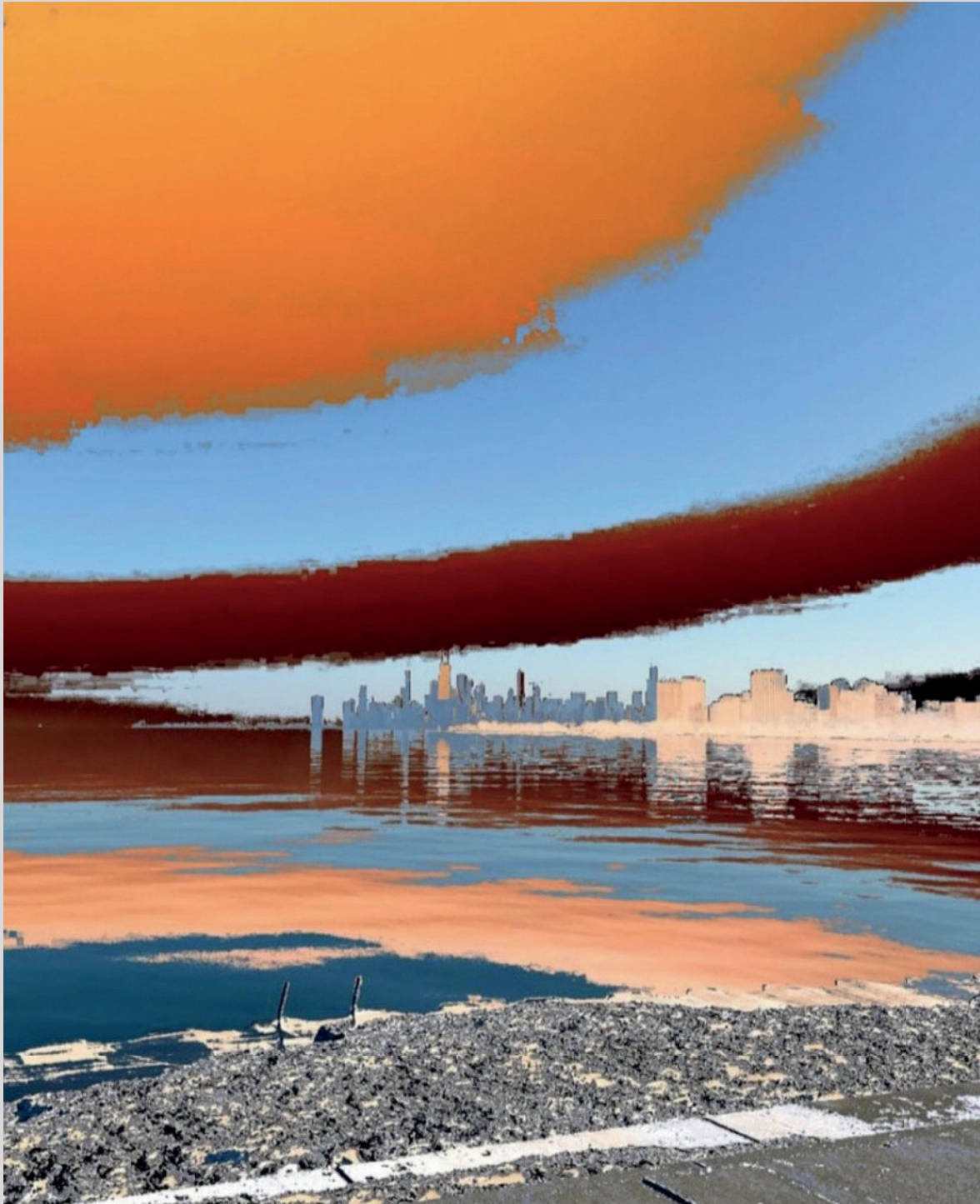


Wildlife, 48x48x10in, copper, bronze, iron, and Asian papers

This sculpture reflects the feelings I have about the many walks in nature I have taken over the years during travels through Michigan's Upper Peninsula with my wife, who is also an artist. Everywhere I look I see curvilinear, organic forms in different levels of newness and decay.

New growth is always inspiring, especially in areas where there have been fires.

Diane Ponder



*Warning Sunset, 20x16, digital photography with image modification not ai,
printed on translucent fabric with paint embellishments*

*eco friendly communities of artists familiarizes everyone with incorporating
sensitivity to climate change and other environmental concerns*

Rhonda Popko



Caught You In the Act, 20x20in, collage, printmaking, acrylics

The peril of decades of using poisons on our crops leads us to vanishing species - witnessing a dragonfly as it feeds on the nectar of a flower is indeed a precious act.

Kim Potowski



Icicles, 8x10in, photo on paper

*In some ways, Chicago winters are **perilously beautiful and/or beautifully perilous.***

Alice Revelski



'Don't Bug Me', 9x9in, acrylic on found board

Diane Holland Rickerl



I collaborated with Bonnie Ann Lievan to create Prairie Poem Poles (PPP). The shapes represent the rhyming patterns of her ekphrastic poems such as WINGED VICTORY:

***“Nine-foot
woman of marble
stone***

***Landing on one
foot just right***

***Wings still open,
all her own”***,

*translated to 3-D
structures. Steel
objects are collected
as scrap metal and
recycled pieces.
Rhyming patterns
typically represented
by letters are instead
mirrored by these
evocative steel
objects conjoined with
poles. So organized,
the objects then
simultaneously*

***imply the soft
flowering
patterns of
slender prairie
grasses, but
also the harsh
environment of
the prairie.***

*Prairie Poem Poles, 84x22x22in, steel shapes
fastened to steel poles*

Carolyn Owen Sommer



*Japanese Lanterns, 17x21in, transparent watercolor on paper
a scene from a nearby pond at Lincoln Land Community College.*

Maureen Boylan Stiebris



Snowy Birch, 21x27in, watercolor on arches 300 lb paper

*I paint with expressionistic brushstrokes to depict the **wild of nature paired with muted colors that reflect its quiet beauty.***

Karen Sugay

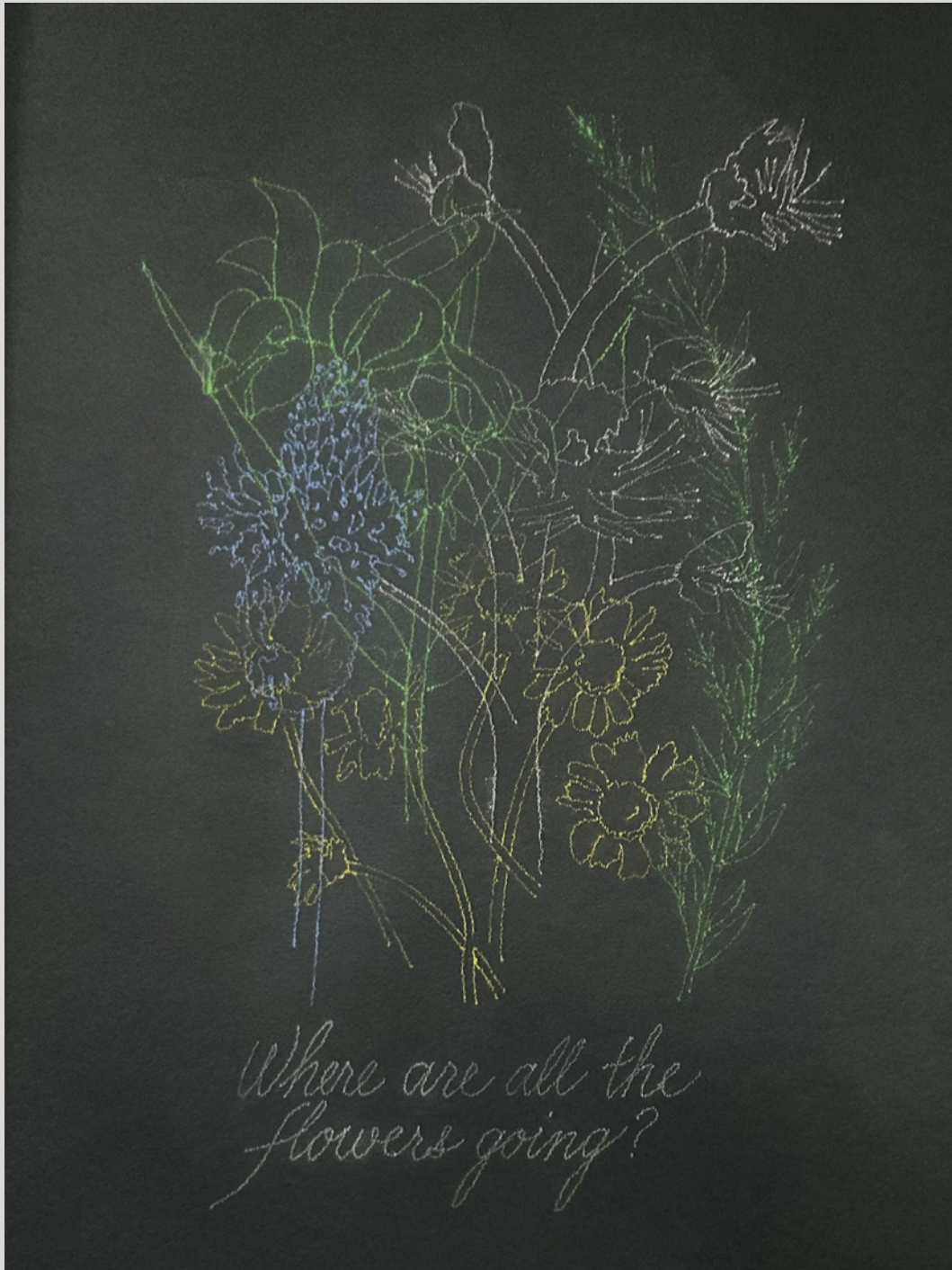
*My work
reflects a deep
love of nature
and **a desire
to respond
creatively
to the issue
of plastic
pollution.***

*Through a
unique process
of saturation,
the plastic
becomes a
medium that
transcends
narrative
norms,
revealing a
surprising
organic
response
that offers
transformation,
reconciliation,
and hope:
it is only by
embracing the
brokenness can
we transcend it.*



*New Life, 36x16x12in, recycled plastic strips, plaster, glue,
and acrylics on wire mesh*

John Terdich



Where are all the flowers going?, 30x24in, powdered pigments on paper

An elegy to the fragility of nature.

Jennifer Tomes



Guardian of the Pumpkin Patch, 12x16in, watercolor on cotton rag paper

explore the **nuanced beauty and inherent transitioning fragility of the Midwest landscape**. The interconnectedness of elements is an invitation to consider the subtle signs of change and the need to **protect the precious treasured spaces in the Midwest**

Janet Trierweiler



Phrases, 32x43in, oil on canvas

sensual nature of art and the healing aspect of beauty...
bringing together what is seen and what is felt as one integrated unified whole.

Carol Weber



Melody, 20x20in, mixed media

*My work is inspired by nature and the **feeling/emotion of a place***

Susan Wein



Ruby Throated Hummingbird, 24x18in, acrylic on canvas with a variety of papers

*This artwork combines abstract acrylic on canvas with collage, using a variety of papers. It is **representing the Ruby Throated Hummingbird in a tree, in the summer.***

My style of painting or mixed media is usually abstract with inference, using vivid color palettes to help convey the subject matter.

ARTIST DIRECTORY

Tobi Star Abrams

Prehistoric Midwest
artbytobiabrams@gmail.com
Arlington Heights, Illinois

Deb Anderson

Sumac
<http://www.debandersonfineart.com>
debrhanderson@gmail.com
Glenview, Illinois

Sandie Bacon

Where the Frogs Sing and Bugs, bugs. bugs
<https://www.sandiebaconstudio.com>
sandiebacon1@gmail.com
Lake Bluff, Illinois

Denise Bellezzo

REVIVAL
dabellezzo@yahoo.com
Naperville, Illinois

Peter Bialecki

And the Birds are Singing
pbialeckiart@gmail.com
East Dundee, Illinois

Jules Briggs

Iceboat in Michigan
<http://www.julesbriggs.com>
briggs.tuz@gmail.com
Detroit, Michigan

Debbie Caruso

Beauty & Peril
debcarus@yahoo.com
Villa Park, Illinois

Laura Cerf-Dahl

Sky Lake 3
<http://www.lauracerf-dahlartist.com>
imaycerf@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Anna Marie Crovetti

Petite Path
<http://amcrovetti.com>
amcrovetti@gmail.com
Evanston, Illinois

Kenny Cunny

A Train Don't Run on Tore-Up Track
kenneth.cunnyjr@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Helen Dannelly

Lavender Water Lily
<http://www.HelenDannelly.com>
helen.dannelly@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Lorette Dodt

Red Trillium
lorette@lorettesdragonfly.com
Woodstock, Illinois

Heather Donovan

Fiery Sunflower
heather.donovan77@gmail.com
Des Plaines, Illinois

Joaann Farrell

Chicago Meditation Garden, Millennium Park
jfar1232000@yahoo.com
Algonquin, Illinois

Lynn Floriano

Earth Pin, and I Feel Sorry for the Flower(1)
<http://www.LynnFloriano.com>
floriboer@aol.com
Skokie, Illinois

Emily F Friel

Light Patterns - Prairie Lights
effriel2014@gmail.com
Downers Grove, Illinois

Victoria Fuller

Magnolia Pod, and Lily Pollen
<http://victoriafullerart.com/>
vfullerart@comcast.net
Chicago, Illinois

Anne Farley Gaines

Hope and Refuse, and St. Ignace Shoreline
<http://www.annefarleygaines.com>
gainesart@yahoo.com
Chicago, Illinois

Lourdes S Guerrero

Jack-in-the-Pulpit
<http://www.lourdesguerrero.com>
lsguerr4@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

John Hatlestad

A Rock A Stick And A Joke
<http://Hatlestadstudio/facebook.com>
johnghatlestad@gmail.com
Grayslake, Illinois

Jeanine Hill-Soldner

Calming Waters
<http://www.soldnerfineart.com>
jeanine@soldners.com
Algonquin, Illinois

Alan Johnson

Triumph of nature
architecturesolutions@gmail.com
Arlington heights, Illinois

Diane Johnson

Midwest Prairie Grass
dianewindsor17@gmail.com
Arlington Heights, Illinois

Kendra Kett

Leaf Glow Duet, and Leaf Glow Triplet
<http://www.kendrakett.com>
bluemoonklk@yahoo.com
Gurnee, Illinois

Pauline Kochanski
when nature gives itself up
<http://www.paulinekochanskistudio.com>
pauline@paulinekochanskistudio.com
Chicago, Illinois

Kim Laurel
Queen Bee Dress
<http://www.kimlaurel.com/>
zuma2@earthlink.net
Chicago, Illinois

Bert Leveille
Waterfall installation
<http://www.bertleveille.com>
bert@bertleveille.com
Harvard, Illinois

Duncan Martin
Waiting
<http://www.duncanmartinart.com>
duncan.martin@icloud.com
Saguache, Colorado

Angela McElwain
Scooter's Lagoon
aamcelwain1@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Jeane Kat McGrail
Nuances: Infinity Spheres
www.jeanemcgrail.myportfolio.com
jeanekatmcgrail@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Diane McKeever
Sun and Shadow
dianemckeever80@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Mildred Annani Mercado
The Buzz of Bees
annanimildred@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Charlene Moy
Keep Out of the Water
<https://cmoygallery.com>
cmoy13@gmail.com
Chicago, Illinois

Anne Nordhaus-Bike
Backyard Bunny In Grass, Autumn
<https://annenordhausbike.com/>
anne@annenordhausbike.com
Chicago, Illinois

Geoffrey Novelli
Formidable Plantings (proposal)
<http://www.novellistudios.com>
geoffrey.novelli@gmail.com,
Chicago, Illinois

Diane Ponder
Warning Sunset
<http://www.diane-ponder.com>
Oak Park, Illinois

Rhonda Popko
Caught You In the Act
<http://www.rhondapopko.com>
rhondapopko@gmail.com
Des Plaines, Illinois

Kim Potowski
Icicles
<https://www.kimpossibility.org/>
kimpotow@uic.edu
Chicago, Illinois

Alice Revelski
'Don't Bug Me'
<http://AliceSharieRevelski.com>
marev@att.net
Chicago, Illinois

Diane Holland Rickerl
Prairie Poem Poles
dhricke1@gmail.com
Leland, Iowa

Carolyn Owen Sommer
Japanese Lanterns
<http://www.carolynowensommerart.com>
coartchick@aol.com
Springfield, Illinois

Maureen Boylan Stiebris
Snowy Birch
boylanstudio@gmail.com
Downers Grove, Illinois

Karen Sugay
New Life
ksugay@remagine.art
LaGrange, Illinois

John Terdich
Where are all the flowers going?
jterdich@comcast.net
Morton Grove, Illinois

Jennifer Tomes
Guardian of the Pumpkin Patch
<https://jtcreates.today/>
Worth, Illinois

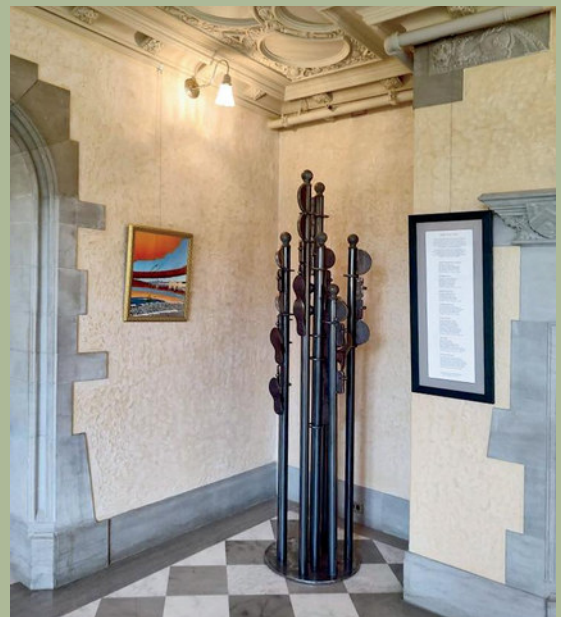
Janet Trierweiler
Phrases
<http://www.janettrierweiler.com>
janettrierweiler@gmail.com
Evanston, Illinois

Carol Weber
Melody
<http://carolweberart.com>
studiocw@comcast.net
Downers Grove, Illinois

Susan Wein
Ruby Throated Hummingbird
<http://weindesign.com>
susan@weindesign.com
Chicago, Illinois



photo credits: (top, middle) Jeane Kat McGrail; (bottom) Anne Farley Gaines



*photo credits: (top) Anne Farley Gaines; (middle, bottom left) Jeane Kat McGrail;
(bottom right) Bert Leveille*

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The Women's Caucus for Art (WCA), founded in 1972 in connection with the College Art Association (CAA), is a national member organization unique in its multi-disciplinary, multicultural membership of artists, art historians, students, educators and museum professionals.

Chicago Women's Caucus for Art (CWCA), the WCA Chicago chapter established in 1973 is committed to supporting women in the arts.



www.chicagowca.com