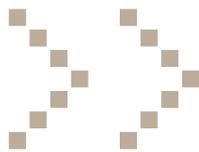


The vibrant art of Jane Armstrong, the Vivaldi Choir meets Armenia's Luys quintet, secrets of sausages, and David Berner's obsession with Shylock's Venice.

CitySæen

Erotic Pears, Conversational Cows



Jane Armstrong among her paintings. **Above:** Friendly cows.

Impressions. First of all, the Ambleside house almost hidden by foliage and flowers, a garden bathed in color. Then Ludde, the Swedish-named flat-coated retriever, looking up unconcerned from the lawn, as he works on a very large bone. Next, Hanna Banana, springer spaniel, springing up at the front door. And then, the resident artist: Jane Armstrong, tall, slim and fit. "I run a lot," she says. "I do the Grouse Grind. I'm a physical fitness freak. But I also like martinis." Okay, my kind of fitness regimen.

But this is only the beginning: inside, flanking the fireplace, are

two oils that express perfectly Jane Armstrong's style. One is a group of pears, erotically feminine. The other is a horse, in full gallop, its powerful image captured one misty morning at the Flying-U Ranch near 100 Mile House. Both paintings are classically drawn, but painted in rich, vibrant orange.

Elsewhere in Armstrong's home and studio are paintings of a row of sensuous red tomatoes; Daisy, the artist's name for a giraffe seen in South Africa's Kruger National Park; a Santa Barbara sunset (already spoken for); and a crowd of gregarious

cows, who crossed a field and approached Armstrong to engage her in conversation.

Armstrong, an artist who may be on the cusp of international discovery, grew up in the British Properties, the youngest—and most rebellious—of three siblings. "She'll do anything," someone said. "Well, almost," she agrees.

She sketched as a child—"drawing in bed, when I was supposed to be sleeping"—and gave cartoons to classmates.

But somehow, the idea of life as an artist didn't occur to her. She spent early years in broadcasting (CKWX, CJOR) and the travel industry, earned a private pilot's license and a residential landscape design certificate ("I thought the course would be a snap—it was brutal"), passed the Vancouver Real Estate Board examination, and spent eighteen highly successful years as a senior marketing executive for a multinational technology firm.

France changed all that.

"There's a group of us—we call ourselves the French Connection—men and women who met in France ten years ago and have stayed friends. We travel together, rent houses in



Provence, Normandy, Tuscany. And the French countryside got to me. The little streets, the hill-top towns, the warm, earthy colors, so different from our cool, subtle colors. They get into your skin." And so, in 1992, Armstrong set up an easel and, with a few classes at Capilano College behind her, began to paint seriously.

She began with watercolors, did some work in acrylics, but "I like the butteriness of oils." Certainly the work has evolved—"bigger and bolder," she says. She works in a studio that looks out, through French doors, on her garden. "I work flat out. I may start at five in the morning, or eleven at night. I paint what I feel. I like strong, powerful things that carry an impact. I'm challenging myself with different subjects. I experiment more. The paintings

are for me, but if somebody wants to buy them, great."

And if somebody does, now is the right time, while the paintings' prices are uncommonly modest. To view a sampling of Armstrong's work, check the electronic gallery at www.wvsketchclub.ca/jane_armstrong.

Armstrong likes spending time in the Caribou, at her family's cottage on Bowen Island, in London, in Mediterranean villages, and on the quiet street in Ambleside where she has lived for the past ten years. Ideally, she would divide her year between Ambleside and "somewhere in Europe—France, Italy, even Sweden." (Her partner is Swedish.)

She is asked, "Have you always been adventurous?"

"Yes," says Jane Armstrong. "Yes, I think I have." ✦



Left: "Apples and Jug."
Below: "Letting Loose."

