

Edmonton artist paints images of hope for Fort McMurray evacuees



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Artist Trish McIsaac at work. *SUPPLIED*

It's a fleeting image that never left her.

Bright pink and magenta hues springing forth from the charred earth where a fire had ravaged the forest just a year prior, seen as she was driving past on a Highway 63 near Fort McMurray years ago.

For Edmonton artist Trish Mclsaac, fireweed is an enduring symbol of hope and renewal.

“The message behind the exhibition is all about hope, hope after the devastation. If somebody from Fort McMurray can look at those paintings and they can see that after everything settles there is that hope, there is that message of hope there, (and) maybe things will turn out to be better than what they were,” said Mclsaac.

Before Mclsaac was an artist, she was a teacher for more than 30 years in Fort McMurray.

During a school trip years ago, on their way back to Fort McMurray from Edmonton, a forest fire blocked Highway 63, leaving them trapped in traffic until firefighters could battle back the blaze.

“We’re driving very slowly past the charred forests, and it was very sad going through this, seeing the devastation,” Mclsaac recalls.

But as they passed through, they came upon an area that had been burned in a forest fire the year prior, where fireweed bloomed from the ashes.

“The way the sun was coming up, and the light through the trees, I suddenly saw this beautiful colours of magenta and greens,” said Mclsaac. Despite how quickly the moment passed, that image of hope and new life never left her.

After Mclsaac retired from teaching, she finally found the opportunity to pursue her art, enrolling in the University of Alberta’s Visual Arts program.

Mclsaac’s 11 semi-abstract paintings, now on display in the Muttart

Conservatory in her exhibition Memories of Magenta, are an effort to reclaim that memory years later.

Mclsaac spent a year creating the works in her exhibition, and no one planned for Memories of Magenta to be put on display as tens of thousand of wildfire evacuees flooded into Edmonton.

She, too, watched in horror as the Beacon Hill neighbourhood where she lived was ravaged by a wildfire that continues to burn, now covering almost 523,000 hectares.

“To see where you lived, where your children played, decimated like that is just awful,” Mclsaac said.

Regardless of whether it was coincidence or fate, Mclsaac hopes those impacted most by the devastation of this Fort McMurray wildfire will find hope and a sense of peace in her art.

“You have to hang on to the hope, and it will get you through,” she said. “It’s that little spot of magenta you see in the forest as the bus zooms down Highway 63.”

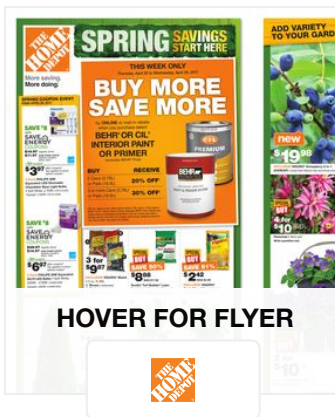
Memories of Magenta is on display at the Muttart Conservatory until June 24.

Admission is free for Fort McMurray wildfire evacuees, as is access to all City of Edmonton and recreation centres.

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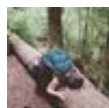


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Audrey Wilcox · Concordia University

That's awesome thanks for that, I live in Fort McMurray and have lost my home and I think my little dig although I am still hopeful for Daisy. I am also an artist painter I paint from my photographs and what my life gets back to normal I will paint again of life and moving forward. YMM STRONG

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