

World renowned art originates in Dunnville

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DUNNVILLE

Jill McDonald's work hangs in the Vatican, the Smithsonian, the New York State Museum and even at 24 Sussex Dr.

While the Dunnville woman is not an artist herself she continues to build on her reputation as an art reproduction specialist through her business The Design House.

The 33-year-old Binbrook native started her business in 2000 and moved it to Dunnville three years ago. While 80 per cent of her business involves fine art reproduction McDonald also does innovative graphic design, custom banners, large format printing, and photo restoration and enhancement.

After studying photography at Sheridan College McDonald quickly realized she liked the technical aspect of the craft. She worked as a custom colour technician in colour darkroom and then began to pursue a career in art reproduction.

After perfecting her skills McDonald formed The Design House and soon found artists seeking her out. What makes her work stand apart from the rest is her insistence to work from the original.

"Others work from the photo of original artwork, but I scan the original painting so I'm already ahead because the colour is closer and sharper," she said. "My reproductions are really accurate to the colour of the original."

This accuracy in art reproduction has gained the attention of artists across Canada and the United States. Many bring their artwork to Dunnville to work with McDonald at her Alder Street studio.

"Artists started coming to me because of the process I use," she said. "Many have seen my prints at various shows and that's how they've found out about me. Scanning the original can't be beat."

"A lot of my artists look forward to coming to Dunnville especially in the



Jill McDonald, owner of The Design House, removes a canvas print from the 42-inch printer at her Alder Street studio. The Dunnville business offers art reproduction, graphic design, and photo restoration and enhancement.

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summer," she added. "I moved to Dunnville because I always liked it and came here a lot as a child. When my clients come to town they realize why I'm here. I'm fortunate to live in a small town and be able to work here too."

As an art reproduction specialist McDonald works with many media from archival matte and smooth fine art papers to silk-like cloth and fine art canvas. She particularly likes working with canvas because it allows for clear view of the completed print with no need for glass.

The centre of McDonald's business is a 42-inch printer which allows her to make reproductions of paintings as large as eight feet. Such a reproduction could take two hours of scan-

ning followed by a few days of colour balancing before McDonald is satisfied with the accuracy for the final print.

"Keeping the painting safe during scanning is my first priority," she said. "My goal is to get the reproduction as close to the original as possible. A lot of work goes into it, but I really like doing this. It's really rewarding."

All her Giclee prints come with certificates of authenticity signifying they are the best possible prints that can be made from the original. The standard size of many of her reproductions are 24 inches by 36 inches. McDonald is also able to make accurate scans of paintings that use 3D or are made of unusual materials.

When clients bring their artwork to McDonald's studio she works with them until they are satisfied with the accuracy of the reproductions.

"I'm only open by appointment and when I'm with a client I don't even answer my phone because they have my full attention," she said. "Most artists work with me exclusively. Many come to me after having a bad print made somewhere else."

Once McDonald completes her scanning of the original artwork the client chooses the proof they want to have reproduced. McDonald will keep that proof on digital file for convenient re-ordering in the future. She also provides artists with a web print to provide accuracy of their artwork for online display.

"Nothing bothers me more than a low quality picture on a website," she said. "The artist will sell more if the print looks good on the website."

McDonald also works a lot with artists through her interest in graphic design. She does business cards, logos, websites, newsletters and custom banners. She has also worked with musicians in designing covers for their CDs.

"Art reproduction keeps me really busy so I don't do as much graphic design as before, but I enjoy it," she said. "I like to be everything for the artist which includes doing promo, art reproduction, website and business cards."

"I've always been an art wannabe so I love this and appreciate it so much," McDonald added. "It just impresses me so much what these artists can do. You show them the possibilities and they just go with it. Artists as a group are really good to work with and they're so creative. I'm really fortunate."

Another aspect of McDonald's business that is gaining attention is photo restoration and enhancement. Her expertise is being sought by many heritage societies including the Dunnville District Heritage Association.

"It's not a huge part of my business, but I enjoy it—it's very satisfying

and fun," she said. "People don't realize what can be done with photographs. These pictures are so important to people so when photos are brought to me I scan them right away so they can take them home with them. I then work off the scan."

Photo restoration involves fixing flaws and making faded or dirty photos look new. McDonald also does photo manipulation which includes adding people or things to photos. She also does glamour retouching, photo collages and can reproduce photos onto canvas.

The only limitation McDonald faces in photo restoration is sharpness. If the original picture is unclear there is little she can do to improve its sharpness.

What concerns McDonald most about digital photography and the general public making their own digital prints onto low quality paper is that those prints have a short life span. This means people need to be quite diligent about carefully storing their digital photo files.

"If people print on their own those prints will not be here in 10 years and that scares me," she said. "It will also mean more work for me to fix them."

While McDonald is kept busy providing the many services offered by The Design House and has been known to work through the night to meet a deadline she insists she will continue to work independently.

"I have no staff because I want to control the quality," McDonald said. "I'm a perfectionist in my business. I would not be doing this if I wasn't. When an artist says my print is better than the original then they see the work that goes into it. I'm often far pickier than they are."

"At the beginning of a project I see all the work involved, but at the end when all the colours match it's feels so good," she added. "It's very satisfying."

Further information on The Design House is available by calling McDonald at 905-701-7621 or by going online to www.thedesign-house.ca