

An abstract painting by Rowena Dykins titled 'Resonance'. The artwork is a dense, textured composition of various colors and brushstrokes. The palette is dominated by shades of green, blue, and teal, with prominent streaks of red and orange. The brushwork is expressive and varied, featuring both broad, sweeping strokes and fine, intricate lines. The overall effect is one of vibrant energy and complex visual resonance. The text 'Rowena Dykins' and 'Resonance' is overlaid in the upper right quadrant in a white, serif font.

Rowena Dykins  
Resonance



# Rowena Dykins Resonance

Visual Arts Centre of Clarington  
Bowmanville, Ontario

April 13–May 11, 2014

**James Campbell**, Director/Curator



*Tri-Colour*, 2013; acrylic on canvas; 24×24"

# Artist Statement

by Rowena Dykins

A long blue view of the lake,  
A warm scented walk over pine needles,  
A soft green moss covered rock.

The abstract nature of my practice is deeply rooted in the natural history of the earth. Times spent wandering through woods, along shorelines or painting on site give me a sense of well-being, and become a resource for my ongoing experiment with the act of painting. I carry that inspiration back to the studio, re-interpreting, intuiting, paring away to that mysterious point of balance and completion.

My practice as a painter has developed over the years to include mixed media and large installation work. This movement allows me to work/play with different materials, creating something to encourage thought, reflect personal concerns, ponder philosophy, but taking them further, weaving them into works, such as *Monarch Migration*, that fills the third floor of the Visual Arts Centre. My paintings and installations grow intuitively, naturally, taking cues from those parts of the world that still do the same.





Gallery shot







*Acoustical Resonance*, 2013; acrylic on canvas; 24×24"



# Resonance

by **James Campbell**,  
Executive Director/Curator

“Resonance. A reverberation, seen, heard, touched and felt. A reverberation that echoes silently, vividly through space. Sent waves of colour, of shape and of light. Throughout rooms these waves travel, on fragile winged flight.


From window to window, opened by perception, by empathy, by chance – taken I am into each full world, bursting beyond any limiting seams. Taken, I am, on this winged flight, to places imagined, hoped for, and dreamed.

Resonance. What in a colour, a colour so pure, can dance in my mind as if a flag unfurled? A purity, a clarity, of heart and of soul. A vision, brought forward, with elegance and grace. A vision called forth from the land, from our place.

A reverberation, welcomed up from its source. From windows that invite swaying trees to be seen, heard, touched and felt. From the pass of a deer on a blanket of white, placed, with reverence, into a window made new.

Resonance. Throughout rooms we are carried – effortless, aloft – above rivers, within clouds, along streams that wander. Powdered wings guide us, so fragile, so thin – yet reach us they do, and beckon – begin.”<sup>1</sup>





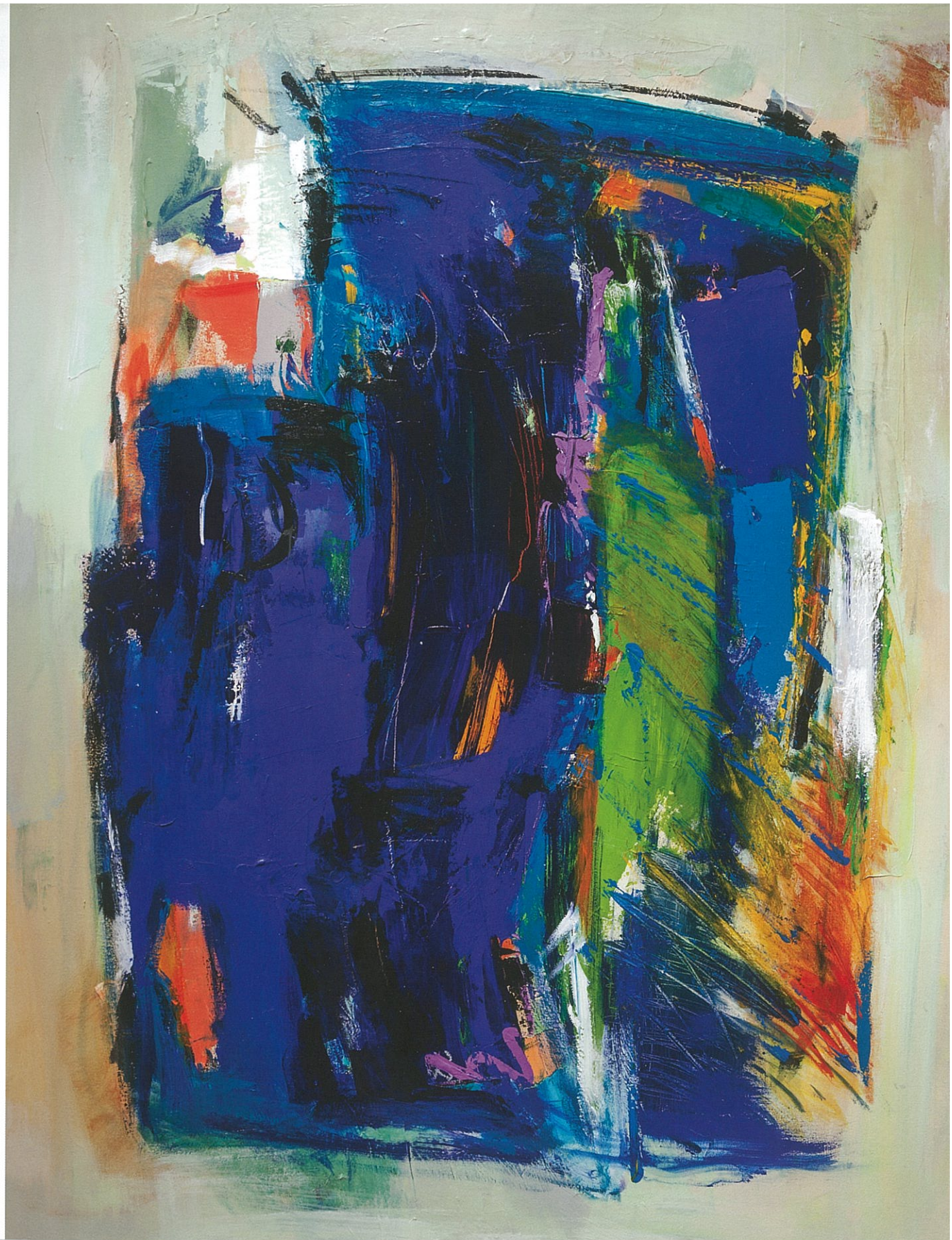
In the early Spring of 2014, Rowena Dykins took us on a journey within The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington. This odyssey took us along river-beds and shorelines, levitated us into clouds and above islands, drenched us in sunlight and immersed us in water. We were even invited to accompany the Monarch Butterfly on its remarkable annual migratory flight. Forty of her acrylic paintings, executed between 2006–2014, one natural found object sculpture, and a breathtaking installation occupied our three gallery spaces. As *Resonance* suggests, the source, the ageless fount from which she draws, is ‘from the land, from our place’, and her ongoing immersion in that realm. “It is key to my practice to wander in a habitat, exploring shorelines near lakes and rivers as well as the deep woods. In doing this, I internalize and recondition the memory of being in nature, a process that subsequently emerges in the studio. Thus landscape, environment, and habitat play a major role in the topography of the paintings.”<sup>2</sup>

And what vibrant, tectonically forged topographies they are. Fortified with her moments of contemplative absorption within varied habitats, the artist enters the studio, in her words, “a site for the layering of textures, over-painting, scraping and smoothing.”<sup>3</sup> Rowena’s studio/home is in the woods, on Big Cedar Lake, north of Burleigh Falls, Ontario, a habitat that provides constant and instantly accessible inspiration. It is in this isolated haven that brush and knife are put to canvas. Within multi-layered veils of intense, joyous colour, there is retained and celebrated an underlying structure, the ancient, ever-evolving structure of our place, of our land, water and sky.

“For Rowena Dykins, the poetry of colour is immediate and penetrating. It is a source for her forms and the guide in her endless discovery of the power of space itself. To have such a deep memory of the earth requires us to have those slow, thoughtful meditations that wash over one.”<sup>4</sup>

*Resonance Series #2, 2014; acrylic on canvas; 36 x 48"*









Clair's Knee, 2007; acrylic on canvas; 52 x 32"



Lynn River, 2012; acrylic on canvas; 6 x 4'








*Toronto Island, 2011; acrylic on canvas; 52 x 52"*






As we stand before Rowena's canvases and ponder the preceding words of former VAC Curator, Maralynn Cherry, the artist's chosen title for the exhibition makes beautiful sense: *Resonance*. We are visual creatures. The hypnotic power of colour triggers immediate optical, intellectual, and emotional responses and associations within us. In Rowena's paintings, exuberant colour, lyrically interlaced within natural forms, conjures memories from our own life experiences, our own travels and observations; they 'resonate' within us.

The artist's use of colour on a six foot high canvas of 2012, entitled *Lynn River*, is indeed 'immediate and penetrating'. The painting seizes us instantly with its scale and its beautiful variations of rich blues, and with each moment further spent before it, even more entices us. The titular component of the composition is subtly, yet unmistakably present. A wispy, thin line of blue snakes its way through the canvas, top to bottom, cutting through a dynamic, intersecting topography along the way. Clearly delineated shapes of colour form a quilt-work which may be read as rural properties viewed from high above. As the intersection of colour and geometry continues to lead our eyes, minimal hits of intense orange leap above the blues. Varied shades of cool, organic green border the blue tones. A sharply defined diagonal line cuts across the top of the canvas, descending right to left, cutting through the river, or a roadway, perhaps. It is when we study the surface closely that an impressive structural complexity emerges: layering, over-painting, scraping and smoothing. Each of these conscious techniques is employed with compelling effect. Sparkling remnants of red-orange, yellow, even shades of purple, are allowed a tiny glimpse at the edge of brush stroke or knife scraping. There is a lot happening in those large, bold forms of blue. From high above, we observe a river and then, we are pulled closer, pulled into this topographic tableau.

We are taken aloft again in the 2011 acrylic, *Toronto Island*. This piece was inspired by Rowena's time as an Artist-in-Residence on Toronto Island in 2011–2012. We are given a reasonably accurate topographical charting of this familiar landmark off the shore of our largest city. But again, we are given more, as we linger over each interconnected colour form, and trace the shoreline of this Island. "In Dykins' hands, colour and gesture come to suggest an environment in flux.





In some instances, her abstracted views take the form of aerial landscape images, which alternately reflect the topographical charting of real geography and the possibilities of serenity, self-definition, and spiritual growth. Dykins' bold abstract mappings explore the artistic process as both an action that belongs to itself and a powerful descriptor of water lapping up against earth and earth jutting out into water.”<sup>5</sup>

The preceding insights were from Carla Garnet, former Curator of The Art Gallery of Peterborough. In this canvas, the ‘water’ is realized through soft overlays of whites, yellows and veiled blues. Land forms, carved with a brilliantly varied palette, do indeed ‘jut’ into this water, and they do so in a decidedly non-static manner. We behold the earth, our ancient land, in evolution, in ‘flux’. Toronto’s island assumes the guise of a brightly clad figure, leaping joyously with head and arms thrust backward, legs and feet rising up to meet them, a human presence, the artist in exuberant co-existence with the land, the water and the sky.

“In nature, light creates colour; in painting, colour creates light.”<sup>6</sup>

Three paintings from Rowena’s *Resonance* series of 2013 and 2014 occupied our main floor galleries. In *Acoustical Resonance*, of 2014, colour becomes light, and light becomes colour. In the bottom right portion of the painting, two strong forms, one predominantly black, the other red/orange, ‘move’ beside one-another. Smaller fragments of red, black and orange seem to follow these larger shapes like satellites, all angling upward through a cool sea of blue and green. These forms, almost like petals of a bursting flower, move ever upward into radiant washes of white and yellow, colour becoming light.

Gallery shot







Gallery shot, Left: *A Blanket Full of Sun*, 2011; acrylic on canvas  
Right: *The Blue Water of Language*, 2011; acrylic on canvas












In *Resonance Series #1*, of 2013, dynamic movement, from and within our natural realm, is again celebrated. This painting is a beautiful sea of inter-tangled colour and movement. Varied, richly coloured overlays in this piece are interconnected further by the presence of gestural lines, cut into the paint by the end of the artist's brush, or some form of scraping tool. This swirling calligraphy calls our eye to the right-center of the composition, and then moves us with the colour on which it was etched. A unified upward, curving right to left swelling of colour and line suggests a massive wave, crashing toward us. Perhaps it's an homage to the Japanese woodblock masters, an influence clearly acknowledged by the artist in another canvas in the show, *Ode to Japanese Printmakers*. The Resonance Series' pieces are glowing exclamation marks for the artist's love of, and long-bred affinity with colour, an affinity released through the unified presence of the forms of nature, our habitat.

In another series, four works celebrate the ultimate source of light and life, our Sun. Entitled *A Blanket Full of Sun*, these canvasses embody a wonderful source of inspiration for the artist. Rowena recounts a discussion with a First Nation's artist, who described a ritual of welcome for the morning light. As they awaken, they leave their place of sleep, walk out and face the East. Their blanket is opened to allow the rays of the rising sun to engulf their body. They welcome the morning. In *A Blanket Full of Sun #1*, we are engulfed in the sun as we stand before the piece. The now somewhat familiar compositional presence of strong black, and orange-red forms are immediately read in the center-right of this small jewel. In this piece, they almost float in an orange, yellow-red 'blanket' of sunshine. Remnants of scraping are clearly visible in the downward ridges of pigment left by a tool, the rays of the sun descending.

Another series of works celebrate the artist's fascination with an astonishing natural phenomenon: the migration of Monarch Butterflies. The series began in our small main floor gallery with three small pieces, *Monarch Migration #1, 2, 3*. The exploration concluded in our third floor loft gallery with the stunning installation, *Monarch Migration*. Hung in left to right sequence, the three small pieces actually constituted a 'continuous narrative'. The story is an amazing one.

*Ode to Japanese Print Makers*, 2011; acrylic on canvas; 36 x 30"





As the artist shares with us, in Spring and Summer, the butterflies dance about open fields and meadows in Southern Ontario. Most of us have experienced that joyous, serene moment as a Monarch gently undulates in flight through our back gardens. In the Fall, they begin an en-masse migratory flight to the Mexican forest or the coast of California. Four generations of Monarch's come and go as this 4,000 kilometre odyssey unfolds. It is an awe-inspiring testament to natural order, and to the resilience and beauty of some of the creatures who are subject to it.

As the artist makes us unnervingly aware, this instance of natural order and beauty is in grave danger. Dramatic climate change, and the liberal use of pesticides, is destroying many of the habitats frequented by the Monarchs. This natural miracle is in jeopardy. Apparently, in 2013, Monarch populations were documented as the lowest in two decades. Rowena's works show us a precious and beautiful thing that we may have a hand in destroying. In the three pieces in our small gallery, the 'continuous narrative' alluded to above, is in the form of a graceful dance across three small segments of the sky. This sky is brushed, scraped and smoothed onto canvas in soft, intersecting veils of white, pale blue, and subtle hints of green. A warm glow of yellow is visible in the centre panel, possibly a glow of the sun. These three pieces of sky are interconnected by a flight path. Thin lines of colour flow from piece to piece, from left to right. The small space between the paintings seems to vanish as this flight path inexorably continues. Small notations of brilliant colour suggest the pilots of this flight, the Monarch Butterfly. The gentle, silent dance of these tiny coloured forms continues beyond the limitations of a canvas. These Monarchs continued their flight to our third floor loft gallery.

It was a genuinely stirring experience to enter this third floor space.

*Monarch Migration*, 2014; acrylic on canvas; 8×8" each









Loft installation: *Monarch Migration*; 2014; acrylic on two canvases; 108×120"



Detail: over one ton of salt

The artist's words: "Monarch Migration is a reflection and meditation on ephemerality, migration and survival. For many years my practice as a painter has expanded to include installation work. Here you will see a Monarch Butterfly floating above a floor of white salt. The physical presence and purity of the salt marking the flight path of the disappearing Monarch, is a statement to our world's fragility on many fronts."<sup>7</sup>

Entering the loft from its southern door, one faced an immediate multi-sensory experience that removed us from our daily expectations, and frankly, from our expected perceptions. More than one ton of salt was sprawled out before us, some 10 feet in width and more than 30 feet in length, contained within a rectangle of thin strips of painted wood. For some, the source of this soft blanket of white was uncertain. Was it fabric, or perhaps plaster? When one began to wander its length, gentle surface undulations became visible. There were subtle waves in this sea of salt, sculpted, like the surface of one of her paintings, by the delicate movement of some form of trowel, or in this instance, the back of a wooden broom, gently forming a flight path. On the East wall of the loft, on a ten foot wide diptych, a single, beautiful 'pilot' of this flight floats above the salt. A lone Monarch, its wings spread wide, is ready to begin its astonishing journey. It will set off, and leave its trace in the sea of salt, in the salt, literally, of our earth.

"But these are flowers that fly and all but sing:  
And now from having ridden out desire  
They lie closed over in the wind and cling  
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire"<sup>8</sup>

The Monarch Butterflies, and their majestic migration over earth and through time, do indeed now 'cling' to an uncertain future. Rowena's pieces nudge us passionately, yet without condescension or judgment, to ponder the fate of a unique natural phenomenon. Her works give us an open window, and welcome us through. Her moments of reflection and absorption in these varied 'places' are preserved in her paintings.

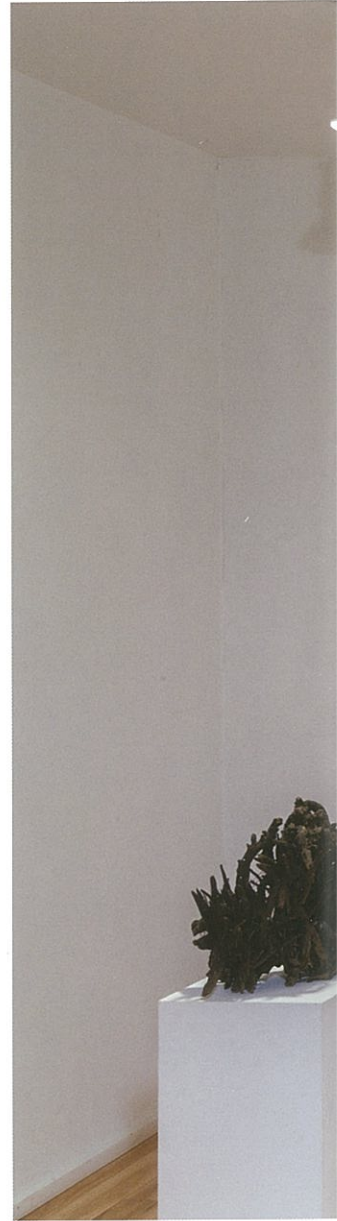


Preserved, but not frozen, the rivers continue to flow, the sun continues to shine, and clouds move silently above us – like a gently lingering musical note, their Resonance continues.

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**Endnotes**

- 1 James Campbell. *Resonance* (for Rowena). Reproduced at the request of the artist.
- 2 From the artist.
- 3 From the artist.
- 4 Maralynn Cherry, *Recent Works – Wolf Kohler, Rowena Dykins* (The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, 2007) 12.
- 5 Carla Garnet, *Rowena Dykins: Riparian* (The Art Gallery of Peterborough, 2011) 11.
- 6 Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (University of California Press, 1968), "Hans Hofmann – Excerpts from his teaching", 543.
- 7 From the artist.
- 8 Robert Frost, *Blue-Butterfly Day*, Edward Connery Lathem, Editor, *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1979) 225.



Gallery shot







Triptych: *A Blanket Full of Sun*, 2013; acrylic on canvas; 16×16" each







*Monarch detail*, 2014; acrylic on canvas; 108×120"

# Lepidoptera's Journey

(Rowena's Butterfly Sonata's)

by **Maralynn Cherry**

White silence  
White – invisible  
Winged  
Into unknown  
Flight

Butterfly flutter  
Air motion  
Maps  
Arrival – departure  
Toward paths  
Natured inherent  
Willed to the pure muscle of earth spin  
Memory routes

Colour – dusts wind-breath  
Propelled  
Rides prevailing winds  
Thermal waves  
Motion threaded  
To cool river valleys  
To the height of mountain-tops

White silence  
Absorbs  
Chitin scales of colour  
Distilled sightings  
Ultraviolet motion  
Palette's mysterious camouflage  
To colours becoming  
Skins of safety  
Settle – nestle – cluster  
Egg  
Chrysalis  
Feeding from the feeder  
Milkweed  
Milks  
The silence  
Of this white invisible winged trail





Gallery shot

# Rowena Dykins Biography



Rowena Dykins emigrated from Wales to Montreal, Canada where she studied fine art at Concordia University, The School of Art and Design at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art and John Abbot College. Rowena has over fifteen publications (exhibition catalogues) and has participated in over thirty group and solo shows such as the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, (*The Real McKay*), 1998 and *Recent Works*, 2007, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, *Ancient Shadows and Other Footprints*, 1992, (*Watershed*) 2002, Station Gallery, Art Gallery of Peterborough, (*Riparian*) 2011. Rowena has been the recipient of Ontario Art Council Grants and Canada Council Grants (for Catalogues). Her work can be found in the collections of the Art Gallery of Peterborough, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, the Station Gallery as well as numerous corporate and private collections in Canada, United States, England and Wales. Rowena lives on a lake in North Kawartha, Ontario.



# Acknowledgements



by **Rowena Dykins**

I wish to thank my family and friends for their constant support, especially Maralynn Cherry and Tony Cooper for your help with editing and wrapping my work. James Campbell, curator/director, was willing to pour fifty pound bags of salt and move heavy paintings – my deepest gratitude for your unwavering belief in the work, your thoughtful writing and the powerful poem *Resonance*. Thank you to the staff of the VAC, Linda Ward, Dionne Powlenzuk, and David Gillespie for your excellent eye with the lighting and installation. Special thanks to Jean-Michel Komarnicki for your photographs and to Meg Luxton for the beautiful essay on *Monarch Butterflies*, Maralynn Cherry for the treasured poem *Lepidoptera's Journey (Rowena's Butterfly Sonata's)*, wordsmith Laurence Dunne, Albert Mueller for our spontaneous salt collaboration, Steven Martin for the long, exhausting but highly entertaining day of taking the show down and delivering it to the next venue, Kelly, Nic, Michael (Salt Crew), Jonathan Bordo, Doreen Small and Dr. Virginia Wally for the loan of paintings and the Ontario Arts Council. A heartfelt thank you to Sifto Salt of Canada (Bridget and Marcia) for your generous donation and delivery of more than one ton of salt and your support of the Arts.

*The Book of Red*, 2011; acrylic on canvas; 36×30"

by **James Campbell**

I wish to express warm personal thanks to Rowena Dykins for her generous spirit and sharing of her insights and thoughts with respect to her work as this exhibition came to fruition. Thanks also for her hospitality during a wonderful studio visit to her northern haven. A hearty thank you to Tony Cooper who accompanied me to Big Cedar Lake to pick up the show for the VAC.

Thanks as always to David Gillespie for his installation and lighting prowess with Rowena's wonderful canvasses. A tip of the hat also to staff mates Dionne Powlenzuk, for deft work on the invitation and ongoing social media promotion, and to Linda Ward for coordinating labels and lists. As always, added appreciation to my editor, Leita McDowell, for her ever sensitive honing of my words, and to Karen Henricks for another sparkling catalogue design. Deep personal thanks to Maralynn Cherry, for contributing the beautiful prose at the close of the catalogue.

A final warm thank you to Sifto Salt, Canada, for donating more than a ton of salt for Rowena's breathtaking installation in the loft.

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front cover: *Resonance Series #1*,  
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back cover: *Monarch* detail, 2014;  
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