

## Raising the roof

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*Visual artist is one of the lucky few to be included in the city's new cultural centre*

By [Brian Baker](#)

Soft jazz plays on an antique radio. An easel sits fully loaded. Walls are afresh with primer ready to be painted in memories.

That's the medium Leanne Davies, recent Artscape Wychwood Barns artist, uses when she looks for inspiration.

From a stack of old photos her mother took in the late '50s, to candy from her childhood to the innocence of her two boys, the Oakwood Ave. and Vaughan Rd. resident uses those memories as the subject matter for her art.

A former graphic design project manager and occasional indie-rock drummer, Davies is now the proud inhabitant of studio 152 with artist friend and fellow mother, Karen Cantello.

"I think it's awesome," Davies says of the Barns. "I don't know whose idea it was to make a space for artists, but I think they knew they wanted it to be some kind of community centre."

Davies has already made herself at home hanging her previous works transferred from their original matte photography to canvas including her piece "Blairmore" depicting her mom's pet dachshund from a photo staging gone awry, thanks to her grandmother.

"The funny thing about the picture is you can tell whoever took the picture was setting it up to showcase Trina the Wiena, but then there's this glowing figure with the head cut off in the background," she says. "There's some humour in some of the images, so that's why I was drawn to them."

Davies admits the photos are of her mother's experiences, but she says they become family anecdotes passed down through the generations.

"This is about someone else's memory, but at the same time your parents tell you stories about when they were little so you have a certain perception of what it was like for them," she says. "My mom gave me this stack of photos, and I started thinking about my idea of what it was like for her."

And in her most recent collection *Sleeping Bunnies*, at the Side Space Gallery Nov. 7-Dec. 7, memories are still prevalent even those that are in their infancy.

The work, done during a two-week residency at the Vermont Studio Centre in Johnson, Vt., was the first time she had been away from her young family, and that absence allowed her imagination to flourish.

Once brush hit canvas, her children, who she missed, became rabbits.



CELEBRATION: Mayor David Miller admires painter Leanne Davies' work at the Artscape Wychwood Barns on Nov. 15. The former TTC streetcar barns have been transformed, in part, into a space for artists.

“For the last six years I’ve been surrounded by children’s literature that feature bunnies all the time,” Davies says, with a laugh. “You have books like *Runaway Bunny*, *Goodnight Moon*, and *Guess How Much I Love You?* These books always feature bunnies as children as the subjects.”

Add in everyday experiences like playing in the yard, sitting at the dining room table or even a trip on the TTC, and you’ve got Davies’ bunnies.

And she knows her boys, ages 3 and 6, won’t stay young forever.

“As my kids are getting older and more independent, I’m starting to realize that the time in my life, where they’re so dependent on you soon will be gone, or it’s going to change,” Davies says. “So it’s almost like the bunny paintings are in anticipation of my memories with them as little kids.”

But that doesn’t mean she’s not worried about her young bucks.

“There is that sense of danger,” she says of her paintings. “And I think as a mom with two little kids you always have a sense of danger, watching them and making sure that everything is safe.”

Now with a new studio not far away from the warren, Davies can hop to her painting all the while enjoying a little company with her studiomate Cantello and from curious visitors touring the Barns.

Davies is optimistic the traffic won’t draw her creative focus away from her art.

“I think sometimes I may find it distracting, but at the same time it’s way more exposure than I’ve ever had before,” she says. “Again, I’m thinking (Wychwood) is going to be a positive thing rather than being worried about distractions.”

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