



PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAUL ALBA

Y E L E N A Klairmont and Emma Kowalenko share a love for the natural beauty of the North Shore. Together, these artists use their creative talents to celebrate the majesty of the area's ravines, bluffs and plant life. Yelena captures it with paintbrush and canvas. Emma captures it on paper through poetry.

Painting to Preserve Natural Resources

Yelena explains, "As an artist, I celebrate the beauty of our local Midwestern landscapes in their immediate and unaltered state. I especially focus on the beautiful yet fragile ravines and bluffs of the North Shore." In fact, much of what Yelena paints are views of what she calls "the secret, magical places of Highland Park."

Two years ago, she began a series of landscape paintings designed to "preserve in paint one of the Midwest's most beautiful resources: our local ravines." To date, she has completed about 30 paintings that showcase details of the ravines as they transform through the seasons.

Yelena is particularly fascinated by the imprint of famed landscape architect Jens Jensen, who designed estate gardens for prominent citizens of Highland Park and Glencoe during the first quarter of the 20th Century. Jensen is credited with launching the conservation movement. He created such treasures as Chicago's Garfield Park, the Cook County Forest Preserve District and the Illinois State Park system. Closer to home, he landscaped the Rosenwald estate, which today provides an entrée to Rosewood Beach. Many of Yelena's paintings depict Jensen's design details such as council rings and stone bridges.

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Translating the Visual into Written Word

Through the art of poetry, Emma Kowalenko translates images from Yelena's paintings into words that evoke emotion. She recalls, "I was so inspired by Yelena's paintings." Under the pen name Emma Alexandra, she has written a series of poems that coincide with select paintings from Yelena's collection.

Emma says, "Our collaboration stems from the spirit of blending together various forms of art," fusing the visual art with creative writing. Both Emma and Yelena share an appreciation for the sanctity of the area's lakeshore and ravine environment. Emma explains, "I am preserving through poetry the richness of

what we have in our natural environment here."

With phrases like "mesmerizing morning moisture magic," Emma evokes a sense of awe and peacefulness found in the simple creation of the morning dew in a Highland Park ravine canyon. She says, "With Jens Jensen, we feel a closeness to nature here that is calming... inspires our artistry."

The combined work of Emma and Yelena is on display at City Gallery during May, in an exhibit titled "Poetic Magic of Land." Emma and Yelena also have joined creative forces with Highland Park and North Shore musicians and business leaders to promote the arts through the Highland Park and City Gallery - a weekend-long event which will transform downtown Highland Park into a sprawling arts festival site showcasing creative arts from over 35 local artists.

In fact, Emma and Yelena met after last year's first City Gallery event, which is closely connected to local creative circles. Emma is a founding member of *Central - A Journal of Arts and Letters*, which features poetry work from residents of the North Shore. Yelena's earlier works - murals - are featured in the Highland Park Fire Department and other local public sites. In addition to their artistic endeavors, Yelena and Emma work with the Highland Park Library, Park District and other local groups to raise awareness of the legacy of Jens Jensen.

Conservation for the Future

Joining forces builds upon these women's shared commitment to the area's ravines and other wonders of nature. Says Yelena, "When we are traveling through this environment, we need to preserve what we can pass on to the next generation to enjoy."

Emma agrees. "Because landscape architecture is so often destroyed easily, it's so important to preserve this environment for future generations. Fortunately, municipalities are now realizing what is at stake and taking steps to preserve the trees, wetlands and ecosystems." (HPG)

Jensen Bridge

by Emma Alexandra

Bridging Matter, Spirit
Elevating Thought, Soul.

Footsteps crossing
Nature's Jewels
Stones gleaming with Season's shade

Liquid Gold Streaming Trees, Sun, Sky
Song Sparrows teasing
Oak Families, Bur, White, Red, Steady

Breathless,
Breathtaking,
Breathing Space ...