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## When art is ‘not a hobby’

Karen Lorena Parker carves career out of passion for paint

Karen Lorena Parker creates custom designed original paintings for private collectors and show homes. The Burkeville resident is one of 22 artists participating in Richmond Art Gallery’s open studio tour this weekend. By Matthew Hoekstra , Staff Reporter

**Mom was in tears. Daughter Karen Lorena Parker had just broke her heart.**

Despite repeated attempts by her immigrant parents to steer her toward a profession with more hefty and guaranteed pay-cheques, Parker was off to art school.

Today, Parker is surrounded by her bold brushstrokes on canvas decorating her Burkeville home’s studio. She has persevered in a field most don’t by creating contemporary and classical original paintings and murals for private collectors and show homes.

“I wanted to be an artist,” Parker says, leaning back on a wood-framed couch her husband made. “My mom couldn’t stop me, and now I’m doing very well. I’m paying my mortgage with my art.”

Parker is one of 22 artists participating in Richmond Art Gallery’s eighth annual Artists Among Us studio tour. All month, participating local artists displayed a few select pieces of their work in the gallery and, this weekend, visual art enthusiasts have a chance to see artists in their spaces.

The gallery’s studio tour opens the doors to artists’ studios around Richmond. A handful of other artists will be showing their work at Britannia Heritage Shipyard. The tour includes a range of artwork mediums, including Parker’s mixed media paintings.

Born in Chile and raised in Calgary, her parents insisted art was a hobby, not a career. But as much as they pushed algebra and physics, they couldn’t stop the renaissance happening within their daughter.

Parker began selling her paintings in high school and hasn’t stopped since graduating with a degree in fine arts from the Alberta College of Art. She now works with local design firms to create commissioned pieces.

It all happens at her home studio—once a small space on the upper floor of her house. Now her entire house is a canvas (her husband, two young children and two dogs get some space).

Parker's face glows as she describes her work, known for its graphic impact and capturing subtle details, moods cast by light and gestures of people and objects.

"I want the canvas to be this deep," says the gregarious 34-year-old, moving her hands a half-metre apart.

She's dabbled in every medium and has experience with a variety of styles—from abstract to figurative, from impressionistic to classical.

Her subjects include flowers, DJs, landscapes (which she once feared), children's scenes and the mechanical beasts that fly overhead on Sea Island—for which she has a tough audience. Her husband is a pilot and her parents are former pilots.

Parker also paints classical nudes. For commissioned pieces, Parker takes photos or a client can discretely submit one.

"Everyone has their exhibitionist side," she muses, reflecting on a time in art school when she placed a personal ad looking for a nude model. As a student, she couldn't afford to pay. She still got 500 replies.

Parker wants her clients to appreciate her paintings so much that they'll miss the artwork when they go on vacation. As much as her paintings are a part of her, she believes the client should also be a part of the work—through process.

Customers choose the size, colour and style of the painting they want, hand over a cash deposit, and Parker goes to work. Before she starts the painting, she gives customers a sense of what the artwork would look like in their home by digitally superimposing approved sketches in the final space.

"The last thing I would want is for someone to have a piece of my work that they aren't happy with," she says.

That desire, combined with business savvy and a personable approach means she has a growing list of satisfied clients.

"There is a demand for my work. I can't keep up."

This is the first year Parker is participating in the studio tour. It will give people a chance to see all the examples of her artwork and get to know her a little more.

As much as Parker is enjoying success, she's hesitant to submit her work to art galleries for exhibition. She admits she's sensitive to rejection, but still strives for artistic fame.

"I want to be a great artist. I want people to look at my work and say, 'Wow, that's incredible,'" she says. "I don't want to be mediocre at it. It's not a hobby."

To see Parker's work, visit [www.bremerpark.com](http://www.bremerpark.com).

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