



The McMillan Arts Centre started life in 1913 as the Parksville School. One of the oldest buildings in Parksville, the school closed in 1976 and the Oceanside Community Arts Council took over ownership of the upper level. The Community Arts Centre now features galleries, gift shop, Studio, offering art classes, concerts and events. A new addition to the MAC is the Community Art Garden, which opened the Parksville Farmers Market program in May 2026.

SUMMER 2026 at the MAC! We are proud to host Joan Larson and VIVA CANADA! Exhibition this summer, along with Claudia LOHMANN, and Grant LEIER!

We also have Creative Kids Summer Art Camps, Plein-Air Watercolouring programs in Oceanside, and operate the Box Office for summer concerts in the Parksville Outdoor Theatre.



McMillan Arts Centre  
133 McMillan St., Upper Level  
Parksville, BC V9P 2H5

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# VIVA CANADA

Artworks from across Canada by rail  
by  
Joan Larson



Together with the  
**Qualicum Playback Theatre**  
July 5th - August 30th, 2026  
hosted by the McMillan Arts Centre, Parksville, B.C.

## Acknowledgements . . .

A series like this doesn't happen without the support, inspiration and patience of many people.

I successfully avoided creating these paintings for about 12 years. Although I had the idea in 2014 (on the original trip with my Mom), it took the creative energy of my good friend Cindy Block who said, upon seeing the first image (painted in 2018), "Oh my gosh, Joan, what if . . ." and that started the process. Cindy's idea to combine the artworks with improv actors trained in Playback Theatre appealed to me on many levels. I knew at that time, I would do the series, it just took a few more years before I made the commitment.

Credit is also due to:

- Jennifer Bate, Director of the McMillan Arts Centre for her enthusiasm and energy for helping to make this show a reality.
- my husband and friend, Paul Smith who has seen me through all of my art adventures and who is wise enough to know when to hold my hand and when to let me tilt at windmills.
- my dear and recently departed friend Marilyn Riopel. Marilyn was my consummate art buddy. She was an abstract artist and helped me see the potential for abstraction within this series.
- Alex Colville, an extraordinary Canadian artist whose artwork changed everything for me.

Lastly, this series is a tribute to my Mother and my last trip with her. She was my original fan, a fierce mother and taught me to love without boundaries. She is still and always will be, greatly missed. Most of the images in this show come from the train trip with her shortly before her death. It took a long time before I came to terms with the emotional aspect of this undertaking.

She would have loved this series!  
This is for you Mom.



Maxine Larson  
1930 - 2015



Tiffany Anderson



Nayana Mongeau



Lyra Sales



Galen Mongeau



Evan Bauer



Cindy Block  
Director



Ashlee Sales

**Playback Theatre** was first developed in 1975 by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in New York. It is a unique form of improvisational theatre that values the healing power of story telling and is currently active in more than 70 countries around the world.

Qualicum Playback Theatre is the first on Vancouver Island and is honored to present:

### **Trainsportive: sharing our inner and outer Journeys**

**Live performances every Tuesday July 14th to August 18th at 7:30pm**

Tickets available in advance through the McMillan Box office or at the door

#### DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

Joan's intricate paintings and the reflections she honors inspired me to create a space in which our responses to the passing landscapes could not only be contemplated, but shared out loud. This inter-section of art and theatre might be a first on the world stage of Playback theatre.

Our journeys are daily, weekly and life-long. They may be physical, spiritual, intellectual or emotional but no matter where we are along the track, there is a constant intermingling of beginnings and endings which, when recalled, might bring us to the destination of meaning.

We do not have a script, we only have you, the audience. And we hope you will share with us some of what your heart has followed.

With Gratitude to the McMillan Arts Center for their support, to Joan Larson for this inspiring body of work and to Shannon and Jill for their contributions to our learning and growing together.

Cindy Block, End of the Road Productions

**Joan Larson** is a Canadian pastel artist whose lifelong passion for horses first inspired her artistic journey—a path she has followed with unwavering dedication ever since. Over a professional career spanning more than four decades, she has built an extensive record of exhibitions, awards, publications, and documentary features. Yet it is the work still ahead that continues to fuel her creative practice.

Known for her evocative and deeply researched series, Joan has explored subjects ranging from the pageantry and tradition of the RCMP Musical Ride to the untamed beauty of the wild horses of Sable Island.

More recently, Joan has turned her attention to Viva Canada, a series inspired by a cross-country train journey and the landscapes, memories, and stories encountered along the way.

Joan is a Senior Member of the Federation of Canadian Artists (SFCA) and holds Eminent Pastelist status with Pastel Artists Canada (MPAC-EP). She currently serves as President of Pastel Artists Canada, where she is committed to supporting and advancing pastel art across the country.

Joan lives and works from her studio on a scenic acreage in the Coombs area near Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island, where the surrounding landscape and rural life continue to inspire her creative practice.

[www.joanlarson.com](http://www.joanlarson.com)



“Boys Will Be Boys”  
from the Sable Island Series



Working on Musical Ride XV

## How & When “Viva Canada” was born . . .

When my Mom asked if I would accompany her on a train trip in October 2014, I said yes. My Dad had died just two months earlier, and she didn’t want to be home alone on their anniversary. They had always travelled somewhere together to mark the occasion.

She wanted to visit family and friends in Ontario, and I was excited at the prospect of another train journey. I had fond memories of travelling between Edmonton and Vancouver as a child. Once aboard, I was captivated by the landscape and photographed everything. The reflections in the train windows were a bit of an annoyance, but I assumed that if I painted any of the images, I could simply remove them.

During our stay in Toronto, we had several hours before boarding the train home. Mom chose to rest at the hotel while I visited the Art Gallery of Ontario to immerse myself in the Group of Seven. There was also a retrospective of Alex Colville’s work. I wasn’t particularly familiar with his work at the time but knew he was a significant Canadian painter. The first painting stopped me in my tracks. Reproductions cannot begin to convey the power of his paintings. Two hours later I left deeply affected and inspired.

That night, sitting in the dome car with a glass of champagne as city lights streamed across the windows, it suddenly clicked: it’s all about the reflections. What had been an annoyance became the key. The reflections created stories within stories, unexpected narratives formed by juxtaposing disparate images. The possibilities were exciting.

I explored the idea in “Diner With a View” in 2018, but it wasn’t until Cindy Block saw it and asked, “What if...?” that the door truly opened. I have always loved that question.

“What if?” invites possibility, curiosity, and the promise of what comes next.





### #1 - Platform

*Vancouver, BC*

Two trains sit empty, waiting to be boarded beneath the deepening blues of a nighttime sky. My Mom and I were literally the first two people on the platform. There are no crowds, no luggage, and no people in sight. Instead, a powerful one-point perspective and strong contrast draw you in. Overhead, the large, Y-shaped columns rise up like a strong, welcoming gesture to open our journey.



### #2 - Elbow & Orchid

*Somewhere in B.C.*

A strong one-point perspective carries us forward as the train snakes beside a river in the BC interior mountains. Inside, my mother's elbow and hand rest gently on the armrest. In the glass, the window works its magic, reflecting the pink of her jacket into the early evening sky.



### #11 - White House *Chaleur Bay, NB*

A lonely house sits entirely by itself beside the ocean while a tidal estuary carries your eyes from the train into the distance. The lighting for this scene was noon under an overcast sky—flat, dull, and incredibly boring. My challenge was to bring life to an otherwise muted landscape. I leaned into the abundance of organic elements here, and I played!



### #12 - 3 Cranes *Halifax, NS*

I thoroughly enjoyed taking artistic liberties with this piece, finding a way to bring beauty to the mundane. As the final work in the series, looking out at Bedford Basin, we are nearing the VIA Rail Station in Halifax and bringing our journey to an end.



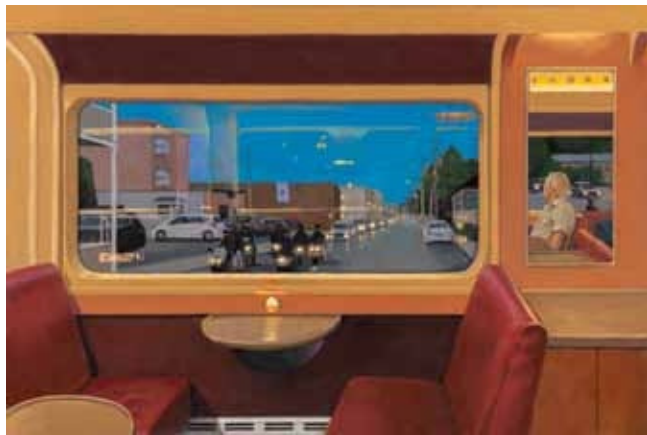
#9 - Leaving Toronto  
*Toronto, ON*

This is the spark. Looking out from the dark dome car at night, Toronto's city lights stream across the train cars ahead. In this exact moment, everything clicked. I suddenly saw how window reflections could bemuse, beguile, and distort reality. This view became the true impetus for the entire series. It's where the landscape stopped being just a view, and the story began.



#3 - Blue River  
*The Rockies*

My Mom raises her hand to shield her face from the blinding sunlight while she reads, a gesture that looks entirely ordinary at first glance. But look closer, and that protective movement changes. Just two months after losing her life partner, she's bravely trying to convince me she's doing okay. Her fingers block the glare of the sky, but they also hide the deep grief she's holding in her heart.



#10 - Bikers  
*Somewhere in Quebec*

This piece explores the contrasting colours of our inner and outer worlds. Inside the rail car, vibrant, warm tones surround us. Outside, the deepening evening cools into deep blues where motorcyclists patiently wait for our train to pass. For a brief moment, life is on hold for everyone. As we fly by, a man's reflection in the glass quietly bridges two worlds.



#4 - Crossroad  
*Somewhere in AB*

The rigid, uncompromising stoplight dominates this scene with its hard, linear grid offset by strong diagonals. But train travel is inherently social, so I wanted to inject some quirkiness into the geometry. Reflections of other passengers sharing the journey and a beer glass on a tray appears to be floating in space—playful details that capture the real magic of riding the rails.



#5 - Dome Car  
*Somewhere in SK*

I love the strong, graphic lines framing this interior; the organic rhythm in the fields is sharply contrasted against the hard edges of the dome car. Off to the right, a girl sits with a deeply pensive expression, but she isn't looking out at the prairie landscape. It makes me wonder what she's thinking.



#7 - Hay Bales  
*Near Nattress, MB*

I really wanted to call this piece "She's Almost Gone." Look closely at the glass to see her fading profile. The reflection starts with vivid colour and strong contrast near her elbow, but it softens, dissolving into an ethereal whisper as it moves toward her head. It gives the scene an otherworldly truth; six months later, she was gone



#6 - Ketchup & Roses  
*East of Winnipeg, MB*

It feels as if that lonely bottle of ketchup on our table is the one experiencing the trip, quietly taking in the passing view along with us. Outside the dining car window, contemporary grain elevators and scrubland dominate the horizon. In the glass, the warm interior reflections blend seamlessly into this stark industrial scene, mixing domestic comfort into the landscape.



#8 - Rain on the Window  
*Northern Ontario*

I find lonely landscapes like this deeply appealing; the quiet solitude draws me in. I want to paint them. The appeal for me in this remote slough is created by the rain on the window. The streaks of water and the ripples in the slough imply movement in an otherwise static landscape.