

KAREN KAIN

THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL BALLET OF CANADA

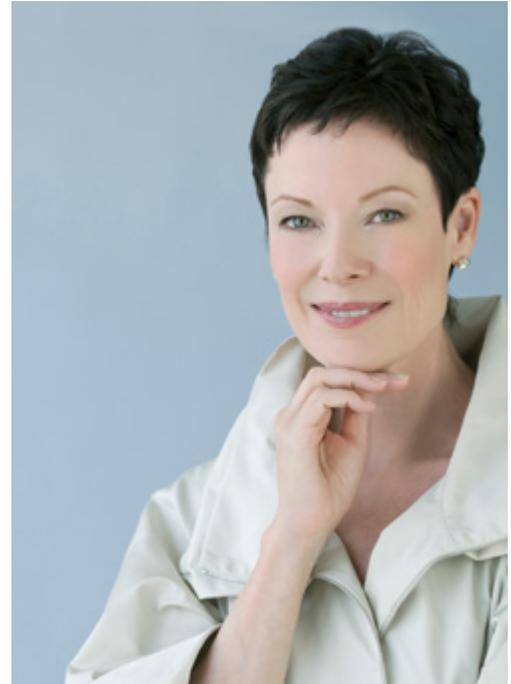
Elaine Fleck Since beginning your professional career in the 70's with The National Ballet of Canada, many technological changes in the way we all communicate have occurred. The world of professional dance is now well represented in the nontraditional avenues of Google, YouTube, Wikipedia, Fashion Shows, Rock Concerts, Music Videos and Performance Art. How has this impacted The National Ballet of Canada?

Karen Kain In this age of technology and instant information, there are countless ways to communicate and illustrate the art of movement, dance and ballet. The National Ballet of Canada produces high quality trailers of our productions and in-depth videos that take our audiences behind the scenes, giving them an insider view at what life at a ballet company is really like. We have a very active following on social media and update our followers on a daily basis with news and information about the company, literally as it comes out. Our online presence is very strong and extends internationally, not just in Toronto or Canada.

EF Do you have any new favorites in the dance world?

KK I am a big fan of Christopher Wheeldon who created our smash hit Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. We will be presenting a work from him, The Winter's Tale, next season and I am so looking forward to it. Another favourite is Alexei Ratmansky who recently choreographed The Tempest. We will be performing it in the 2014/15 season. Our audiences will remember his acclaimed Romeo and Juliet that was created for our 60th anniversary season. I also admire works by our own Principal Dancer and Choreographic Associate Guillaume Côté whose Being and Nothingness (Part 1) was presented on our recent Innovation programme this past fall. Choreographic Associate Robert Binet also created a new work titled Unearth for Innovation which I was impressed with and I am looking forward to seeing more works from him.

EF From your perspective are there more opportunities for young dancers/choreographers today, than in the past?



Karen Kain

KK At The National Ballet of Canada, we encourage the creation of new Canadian works. Recently our second Innovation programme featured three world premieres and one new work, from experienced to young new choreographers. When the schedule allows, we open the studios to our dancers to explore their choreographic ideas and creativity with their colleagues in our Choreographic Labs.

EF Is there any advice you would like to share with young Dancers, Art Patrons and Artists, about the current Art Scene in Canada and the World?

KK They don't need my advice. The art scene in Canada is vibrant and I am constantly impressed with the inventiveness, resourcefulness and sheer energy of young dancers and artists plus the bigheartedness and generosity of art patrons.

INTERVIEW WITH ART DEALER, GALLERY OWNER AND CURATOR

ELAINE FLECK

EMBRACING LIFE THROUGH CREATING, LEARNING AND KNOWING

INTERVIEW BY ANIA ROMANIAK

BLOG INK NOIR



Elaine Fleck (left) with artist Kathy Kissik

Art history is built on a foundation of unforgettable stories: fascinating, bold, sometimes tragic, full of romance, and most of all overflowing with mesmerizing personalities. There is a reason why we say “that’s a Picasso” as if we are in the presence of the artist himself. Part of that history is due to the monumental role art dealers play in artist’s lives. Picasso, for example, would not be a household name without Ambroise Vollard, a brilliant individual in his own right who helped with exposure, finances and, most importantly, emotional support for an array of now historically significant artists.

Then and now exceptional art dealers must be intelligent, knowledgeable, intuitive, educated, and business oriented – and that’s just scratching the surface. Art dealer, gallery owner, and curator Elaine Fleck of The Elaine Fleck Gallery fits the role on all accounts. She graciously sat down with me this weekend to discuss the inner workings of her job, her passion, and just how vital a good art dealer is to any great artist. Below are brief excerpts from our conversation. I know I have said this before but it is the absolute truth: the most painful part of my job for Ink Noir is narrowing down quotes when speaking to such vibrant personalities.

“I own a gallery on West Queen West in the trendy art and design district. Being in a good location is key for a commercial gallery because commercial galleries are very public activities. You are dealing with the whole public, art buying is no longer on the weight of the very wealthy people. Since the 80s there have been credit cards and since there is credit I have observed that the gallery is for everyone, and that’s a great thing because now I can speak to the whole world as patrons of the arts. That’s how the gallery started, that’s what we want. The broader public is involved, I always include them in my gallery: I include them in soirees and they’re included in the whole process of education and understanding. I try to bring the whole community together and I’m actually getting quite well known for that.” “If a person is truly dedicating their lives to what they want to get out to the world, someone has to listen to that. You can’t ignore that kind of communication – you could probably drive someone crazy not acknowledging that and that’s probably why people look to artists as being crazy. But I look at it in a different way. Artists are up there on the aesthetic plane so there has to be a liaison, and I’m that liaison that brings people up to that aesthetic because I’m so passionate, so in love with the artists that I show, I so adore them that I want the world to know about my artists. For my artists it is a gift to be part of that kind of a team, you are stronger as a team. All throughout history there are art dealers and artists. My mentors are people like Edith Halpert who started the first downtown gallery in 1926 in Greenwich Village with a focus on being an art dealer. She was a very strong woman and went to the village for practical reasons. Do you know why? Because it was close to where the artists lived in the ghetto so that they could be part of the gallery. It was amazing who she would bring in! When people tell you that there’s no walk-in traffic and it’s all from a black book I laugh because it is such a public activity. Who parked in front of her front door and walked down to the basement? Rockefeller’s wife, Abby Rockefeller, who became her best client, art patron, and took her through the great depression.”

Fleck is always actively educating herself, she has taken a variety of courses consistently for the last twenty-two years and



Amy Shackleton **Spring Forward** Acrylic and Enamel on Canvas 45" x 45" 2014 (Toronto and Muir Woods)

prides herself on being a sponge to the knowledge she acquires through art authorities, art dealers, other curators, the internet, and the art buying public at large. She is also an avid reader having inherited a love of books from her mother. But her art education extends well beyond with a past as a trained dancer in New York and a whole talented family engaged and engulfed in various arts, as well as philanthropic ventures. One may say it's in her blood. This innate intuition has resulted in a handful of talented and accomplished artists selected to be represented by her gallery.

You have probably realized as you read this that Fleck wears many hats, from owner of a gallery, to business woman, to active student, curator, art director and art dealer. In reality, she has many more. For one thing, she not only engages and educates the public that comes through her doors, but also the frequent artists. Artists may take a variety of photography workshops at the gallery (taught by the gallery's director Gary Ray Rush, a highly accomplished photographer – if you want to be wowed take a look at his portraits), they may frequent her informative seminars and art talks, and she does weekly portfolio viewings. In her popular and surprisingly enjoyable portfolio viewings she presents the artists with a clear and objective outline of art critique and curation, clearing up the often misused and elusive concept of “unique”, followed by an understanding of the technical expertise that allows for an emotional impact. Finally, it comes down to the message. “The universal message, I'm talking about the artist knowing what they want to say. You'll find all the real greats that we know in history, they got what they wanted to say out and they can rest in peace. It's a beautiful thing. From the get-go Amy Shackleton had a goal, she came to me as a young artist and she knew what she wanted to say. She had a sustainable futures that she wanted to show and she worked until she could show them so clearly anyone can get it. You don't have to be a PhD from Harvard to know what she is communicating to the world.”

“I am the curator and art director of my publication, The Fleck Contemporary Art Magazine, which goes out twice a year. It was a catalogue over the past five years where we literally sent

out over one hundred thousand published catalogues that are very beautiful and very well worked on and put together. But I and Gary Ray Rush, the editor of the catalogue, we wanted more content for the readers. We wanted people to have more information about what we are doing and get to know our artists... Now we have this publication and we have included other galleries, like Steward Jackson next door who writes about his love for the Japanese print and what turned him on to it when he was a young man and why he has been selling those for 30 years. It is just so beautiful. We have a journalist from India writing about Indian installation, and if you look at the pictures – it's so different and delightful that we could bring this into art buyer's homes. We hire a distribution company to put it into fifteen thousand homes twice a year and artists promote, we provide a platform to promote and have been doing this going on six years.”

“My next job is my most important, and that's my art dealer job. My art dealer job is the one that keeps the scene going and it is to make my artists known and to promote the works that they are doing, and to continue to expand their client base and to get them to the next level in the art industry, which is art collectors demanding their art works. I have done an incredible job with Amy Shackleton, she is an example of a young artist with an art dealer that brought her from coming out of school and moved it up up up to the next level. What I bring heavily to this scene is my diverse background in the arts. I've seen every aspect of the different industries in the arts come to the same place: spirit, mind, body. You have a very beautiful exterior view of how the whole machine should work when you can see it working like that. I've represented artists since I was eighteen, I've been in the music industry, I've been in the photo industry, I've been a stylist, I've been a director on set, I've done so many things that add up to this gallery so I like to think of it as, I do the art in front of me. And it's a great way to be.”

“You really see when you are raised in the arts like I was that it is not about going in for a paycheck, it is going in for the create that you yourself have to do, which is so important in life. It is a wonderful thing to embrace life through thriving on creating, learning and knowing.”