



Reckless abandon, 20" x 40"



which turned into Art in the Park," she says. "It just grew and grew and grew."

Allen now shows her work at art shows across Ontario as well as in galleries in Ottawa, Toronto and Oakville. She is inspired by nature and is often drawn to florals which allow her the opportunity to play with colour, form and composition. "I've always been drawn to a certain style that was somewhat representational but also loose and gestural," she says. "It's hard to express artistically but it is not about just painting a pretty vase of flowers."

Allen has been focusing on florals for the past four years but also enjoys painting landscapes and small birds. She does small paintings of birds for art shows and open houses which sell at a lower price point than some of her larger, more intricate work. "They're fun and very whimsical," she says.



As I walk up the steps of the old Standard Bread Company building at 951 Gladstone Avenue, I wonder if I've come to the right place. The only reason I press the bell for the third floor buzzer is the sign above the door marking The Loft Art Studios and the note telling me to be patient to give time for the artists to race down from the third floor to welcome visitors. Within moments artist Nicole Allen meets me at the door in jeans and a long sleeve shirt spattered in paint. I've definitely come to the right place.

Allen's studio is bright, spacious and covered in art and painting supplies. She has been a part of the collective of 18 different artists who have their studios at The Loft for seven years. Prior to that she was painting at home but as her business grew, she found that she needed a separate space to let her creativity blossom. "My work got bigger and my art started taking on a life of its own," she says. "Having a space like this is a game changer."

Allen has always been an artist at heart. Growing up in Oakville, Ontario her father was an avid landscape painter and



No hard feelings, 6" x 6", A star is born, 6" x 6", Golden opportunity, 6" x 6"

raise a family. Her art fell by the wayside while she was raising young children but once they got older, she felt the urge to paint again. She started taking night classes at the Ottawa School of Art while also going back to school at Algonquin for museum studies. "I was thinking I would paint and work in the museum sector because I thought that was a more practical approach," she says. "I was still holding on to the idea that I couldn't paint full-time."

Allen did contract work in the collections department at the Canadian War Museum for about a year while taking classes and painting in her spare time. She says she fell into showing her art by fluke when she was asked to contribute some paintings to a school fundraiser. "That turned into a collective show in the neighbourhood

As someone who never thought she could make a career as an artist Allen is thrilled that she gets to come to work every day and do something she loves. She says joining the community at The Loft has been wonderful for her creative process and she values being around other talented artists every day. "The value of having my own space and being a part of a community is huge," she says.

Allen says she knows she is on the right path when she sees the joy that her paintings bring to other people. "When I hear that somebody is happy when they look at my work then I know that I am doing the right thing," she says. "I only wish I could have figured it out sooner." ■

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# Naturally beautiful

## THE ART OF Nicole Allen