

# Venice is the next destination for Sault Ste. Marie artist Eileen Halfpenny's handiwork



By Jeffrey Ougler, Sault Star  
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Jeffrey Ougler - Sault Star Eileen Halfpenny holds two of her works exhibited at Agora Gallery in New York City earlier this year. Two other paintings have been sent across the Atlantic for an upcoming Venice show.

SAULT STE. MARIE - Given her exposure in both the Big Apple and Floating City, it's fair to say Eileen Halfpenny's handiwork is making waves.

On the heels of being exhibited at New York City's Agora Gallery in December and January, the Sault Ste. Marie artist's work is headed across the Atlantic to be part of Liquid Room and The Labyrinth, which, according to the event's website, is "a unique exhibition path." The Venice exhibit is hosted in two venues: Palazzo Ca' Zanardi, Feb. 26-28, and the Venice Art House Gallery, Feb. 27 to March 7. It's advertised as a mix between contemporary art show and art residency.

Halfpenny said she was approached by event officials who saw her work on the Internet — similar to that of the Agora invite — and were aware of her New York gig.

"Just getting involved with the Agora Gallery, it sort of opens doors internationally," Halfpenny said Tuesday.

"They said they were very impressed with my work and they wanted me to be in the show."

Artists featured hail from around the globe. Only three Canadians, including Halfpenny, are among the more than 50 featured; the other two Canadians are also listed in her category: Collective Show, at Venice Art House Gallery.

Unlike for her New York show, Halfpenny isn't attending the Venice exhibit. And different paintings have already been sent overseas. But like those featured south of the 49th parallel, the two works slated for Italian viewing feature Algoma District natural wonders, a common Halfpenny theme.

Picturesque Old Woman Bay, north of Sault Ste. Marie in Lake Superior Provincial Park, is featured in watercolour and acrylic.

Prior to Venice and the New York exhibition, Sensorial Realms, Halfpenny had her art, most often depicting the eastern shore of Lake Superior, exhibited locally. Some of her stuff is currently on display at Art Gallery of Algoma and she's scored other local recognition, including being selected last year as one of 10 Sault Ste. Marie and area artists in the running to create art for gifts for visiting dignitaries.

Will international exposure lure Halfpenny away from her usual subject matter, perhaps prompting depictions of more exotic hotspots?

Halfpenny quickly brushes aside such a suggestion, insisting she's hardwired, after two decades with Ontario Ministry of Tourism, to "promote" the land she's come to love.

"It's very hard for me to let go of that ... brainwashed, promoting Ontario," said the Montreal native, 72, with a laugh.

"It's not a hard place to promote. And I always find this area is so beautiful it would be a sin not to promote it.

"I automatically do that with my work."

Halfpenny said artists must practise public relations — something that doesn't necessarily come naturally — if they wish to have their work seen by more than merely family and friends.

"If you want to get noticed, you have to participate in these events," she said. "You can't have all your paintings in the basement and not let anyone see them. It's see and be seen, sort of thing, to let people know what you can do."

Getting noticed elsewhere has added value to Halfpenny's local reputation.

"More people are talking to me and getting more interested in my work, which is really nice," she said.

As for the Venice gig, Halfpenny said she has high hopes — and hopes her work is spared damage due to recent flooding there.

"I hope my paintings don't get wet," she laughed.

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