

Andrew Owen A01  
&  
Sheila Yihua Hu

# *Nine Rivers Romance*

+IMPRESSIONS

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# Nine Rivers Romance

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**Nine Rivers Romance** is a series of paintings by the married couple Canadian-born Andrew Owen A01 and Taiwan-born Sheila Yihua Hu.

The paintings are created with the natural wildflowers and grasses growing along each of the Greater Toronto Area's "nine rivers" watersheds that flow into Lake Ontario between Etobicoke and Ajax: Etobicoke Creek, Mimico Creek, Humber River, Don River, Highland Creek, Rouge River, Petticoat Creek, Duffins Creek and Caruthers Creek.

This series developed from the ongoing [Impressions](#) series of paintings begun as small-scale works on paper in Korea, Japan and Taiwan, before greatly expanding in scope and scale on canvas during seven years in Vancouver, and now several years in Toronto.

The paintings are created outdoors with an original, experimental process employing natural wildflowers and grasses that captures intricately detailed life-size impressions of the wildflowers.

Remarkably, brushes are not used, and the painting surface is not touched directly. Quoting a review in [Canadian Art](#) magazine, "the flowers have been allowed, in effect, to speak for themselves."

Nine Rivers Romance is a set of nine large (8 x 5 ft.) paintings created at each of the nine rivers as one massive installation, 8 feet tall by 45 feet wide, along with many smaller paintings created along the nine rivers.

Loading bicycles each weekend with tarps, canvas, paints, food and water, they take GO trains along the lake shore to the mouths of each river. Riding along the riverside trails collecting local wildflowers and flora, we find shaded and secluded work sites by the rivers' edge. The large un-stretched canvases are arranged horizontally on tarp-covered ground.

Donning work gloves and filter masks, and working with flowers, grasses, dirt, sun, heat, humidity, wind, rain and mosquitoes we work quickly non-stop in one session to complete each painting before nightfall.

The process is experimental: only some works "succeed," prompting repeated visits and iterations. Select works are later stretched over custom-built frames in-studio.

What began years ago as Sheila assisting Andrew has now blossomed into an equal collaboration called Nine Rivers Romance; with the sense of "romance" as both the romantic love between a couple, and a fantastic, marvel-filled adventure.

Beyond immediate appearance as large floral paintings, the program offers many layers of reading: hydrological, geographical, botanical, historical, chronological, philosophical, conceptual, personal, bicultural, technical and aesthetic.

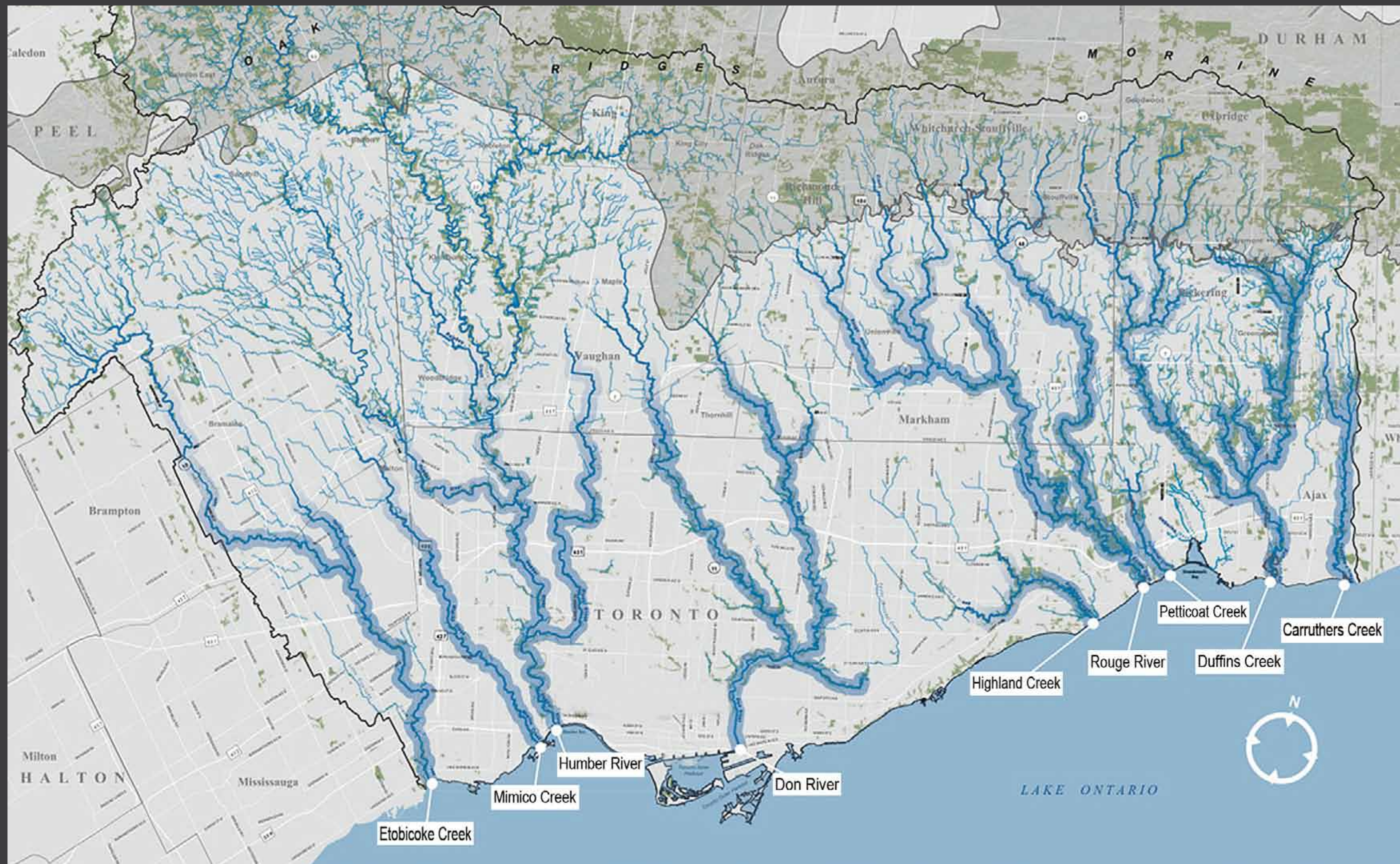
The aerosol paint and positive stencilling process is related to that used in the oldest extant paintings of hand prints on cave walls; Employing aerosol paints is an evolution from Andrew's history as a pioneer of Canadian graffiti art.

The works synthesize Eastern and Western painting: the vertical compositions with oblique negative space are informed by classical Chinese painting; the cycle of seasons revealed by wildflowers changing over time references ancient poetic, philosophical and moral principles; created with loosely planned composition very quickly in one sitting while embracing local conditions, chance and accidents that occur is inspired by Chan (Zen) painting.

Created along the main watersheds of the GTA references the earliest pathways, fishing and hunting grounds of the First Nations and later immigrant trappers, traders and settlers from which Toronto developed. Created with native and naturalized wildflowers, grasses and plants, and more recently introduced and invasive "weeds", the works present under-appreciated botanical features of these important natural watersheds flowing into Lake Ontario.

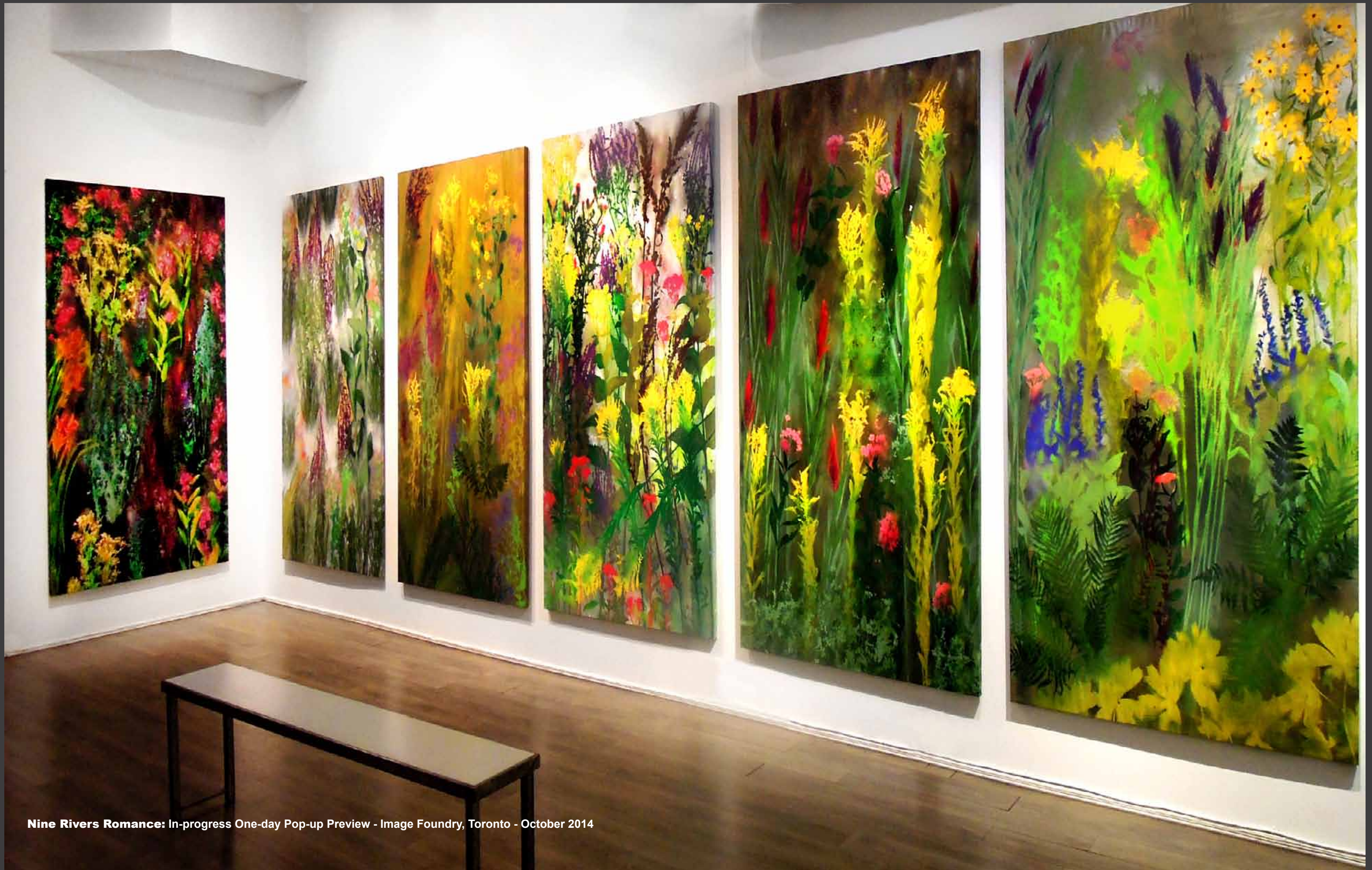
A short, 10 minute documentary on Andrew and Nine Rivers Romance released by Now Toronto is available here: [NOW Toronto: Lovers and Fighters: Andrew Owen A01](#)





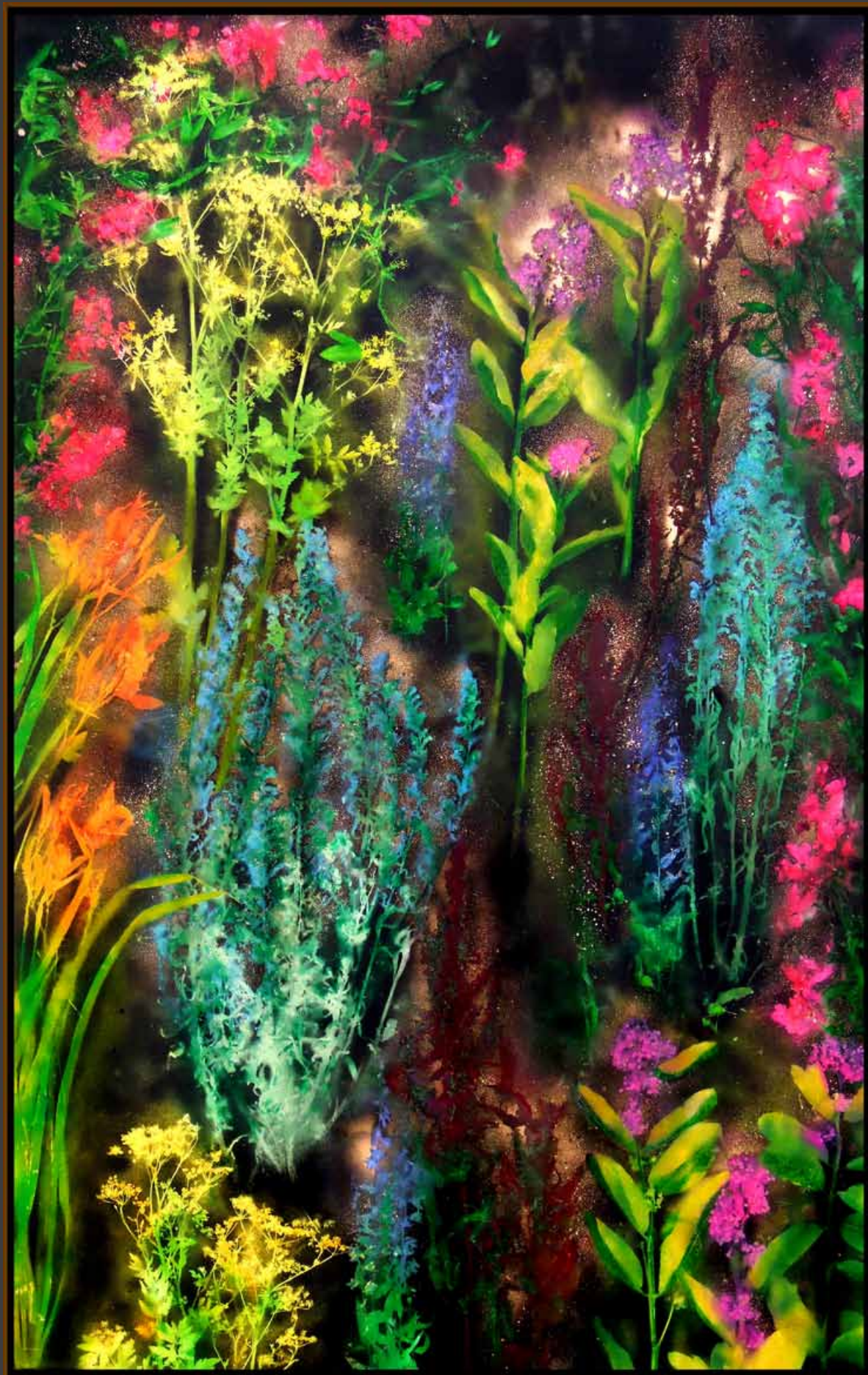
**Nine River Watersheds of the Greater Toronto Area - between Etobicoke in the West and Ajax in the East**  
Etobicoke Creek - Mimico Creek - Humber River - Don River - Highland Creek - Rouge River - Petticoat Creek - Duffins Creek - Carruthers Creek





**Nine Rivers Romance: In-progress One-day Pop-up Preview - Image Foundry, Toronto - October 2014**





**Etobicoke Creek Wildflowers**

2014      Toronto, Canada      aerosol enamel on canvas      2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Mimico Creek Wildflowers**

2014 Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

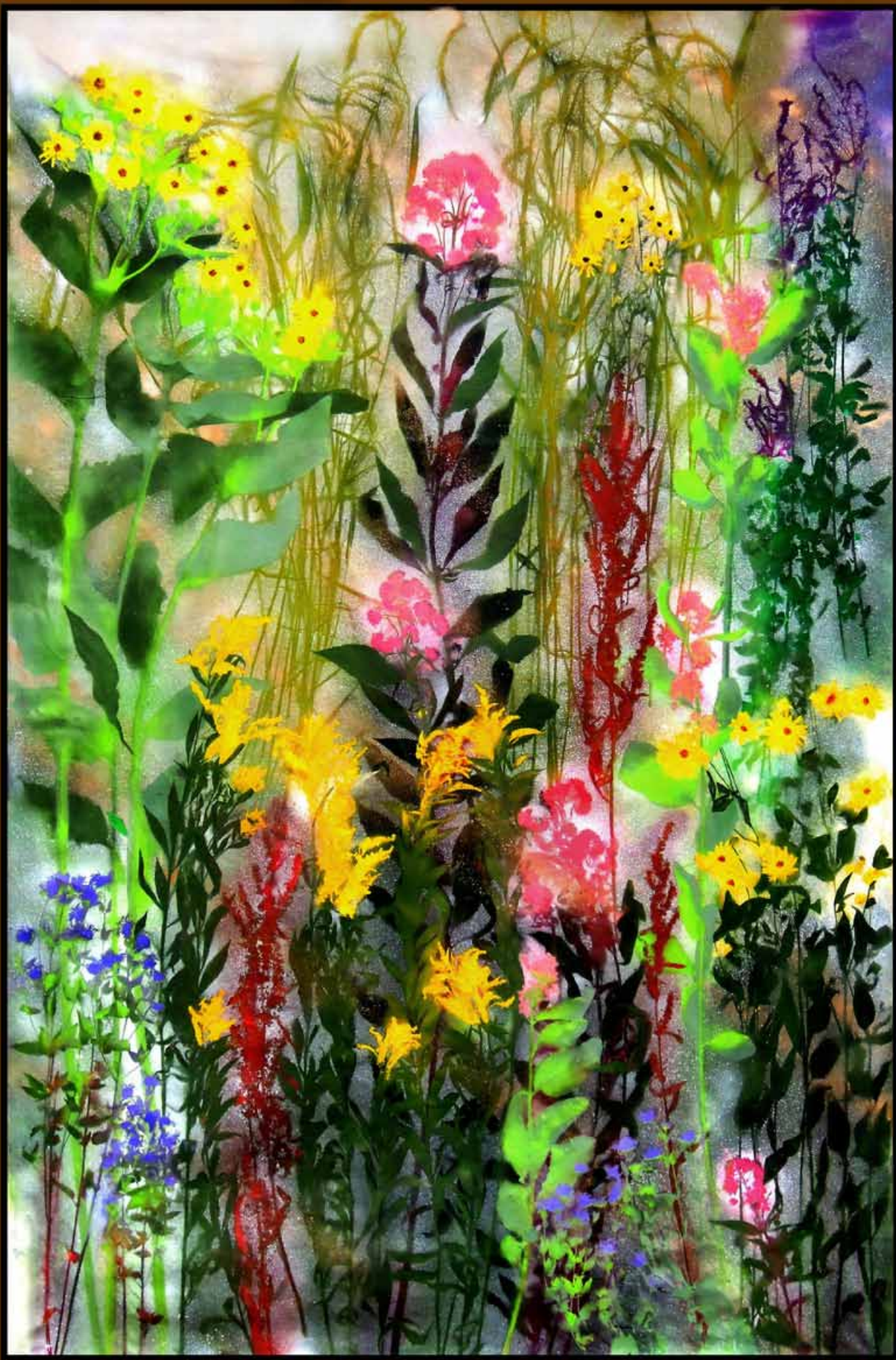
2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Humber River Wildflowers IV**

2015

Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

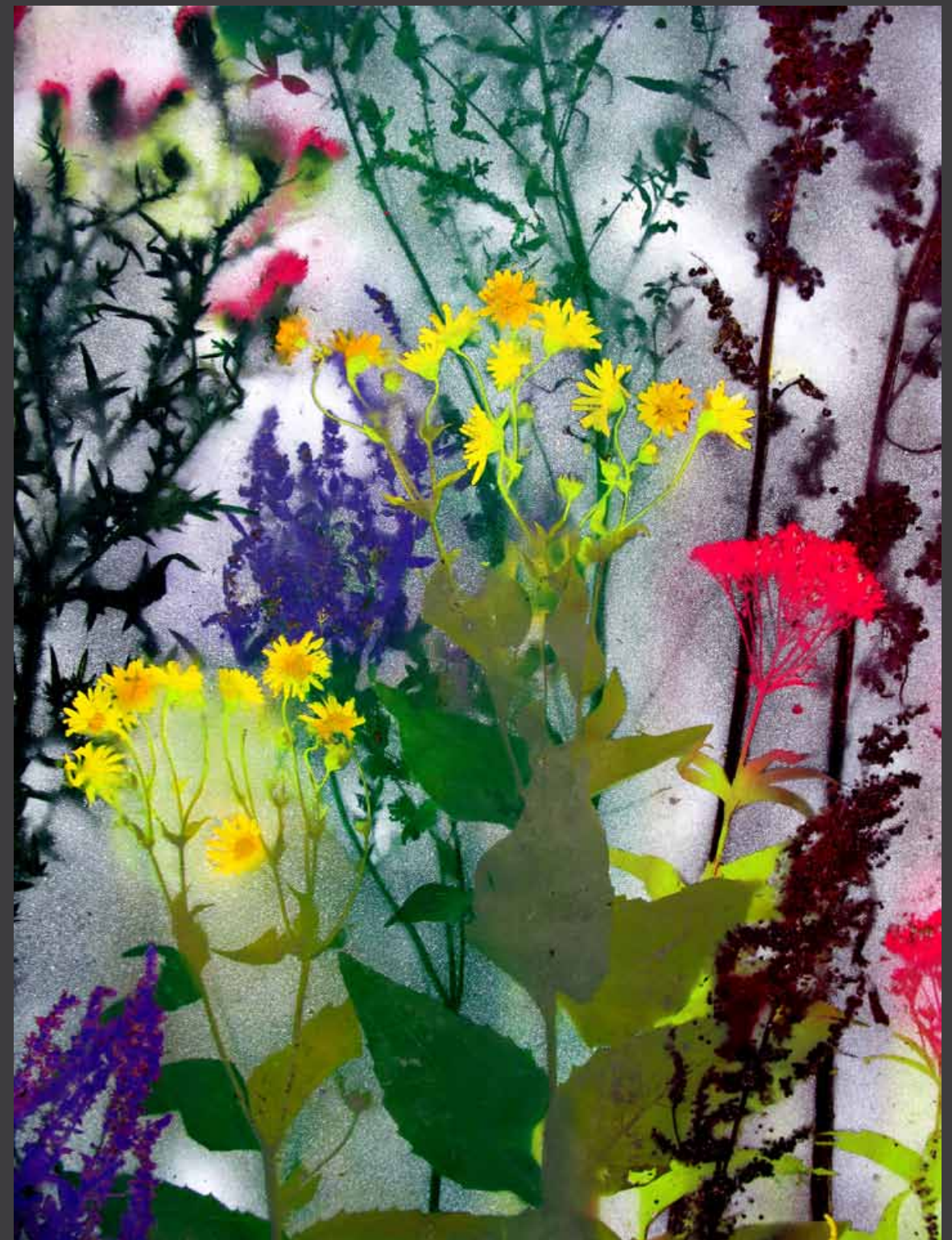
2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Don River Wildflowers**

2011 Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

detail

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Highland Creek Wildflowers II**

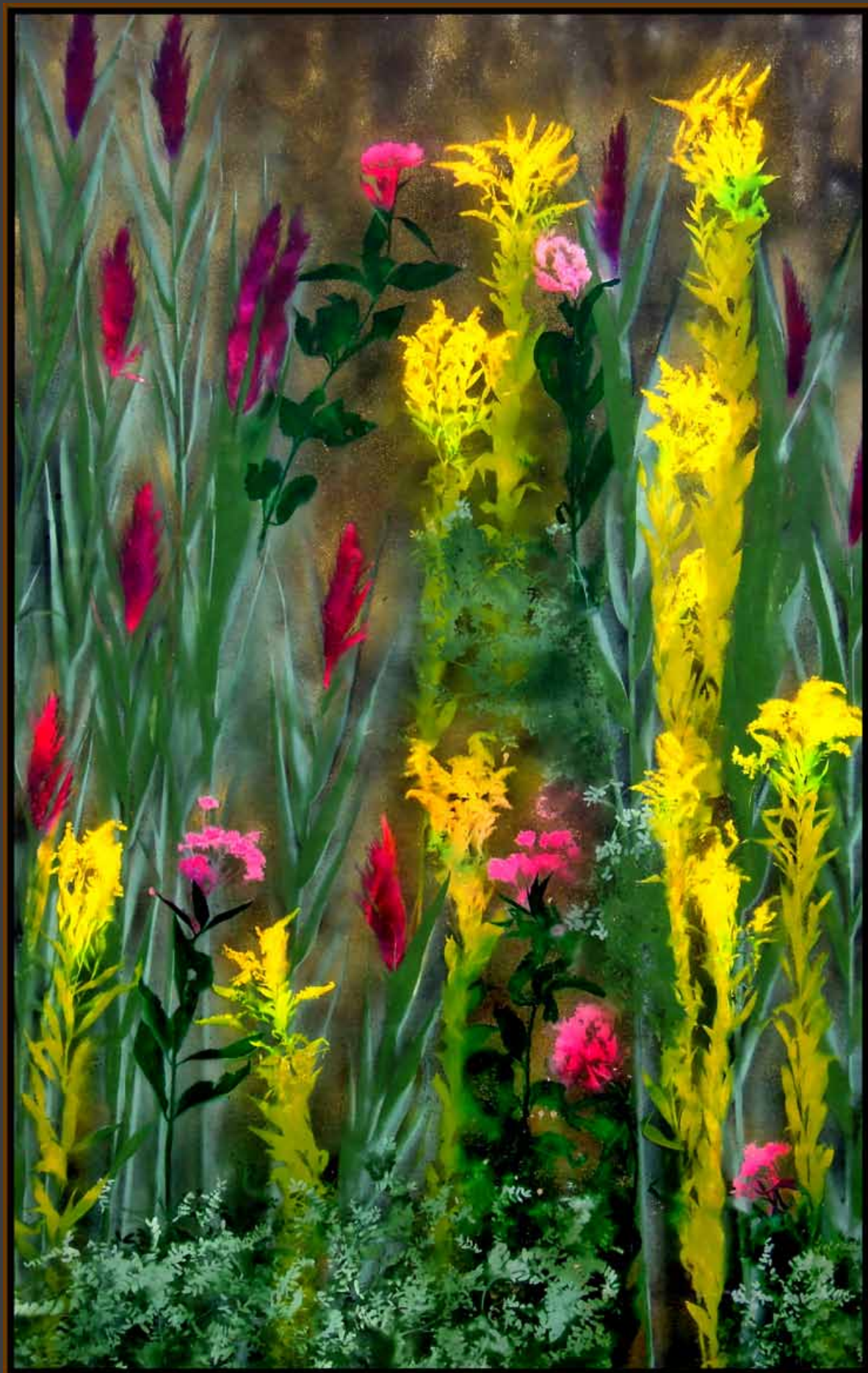
2014      Toronto, Canada      aerosol enamel on canvas      2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Rouge River Wildflowers**

2014      Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

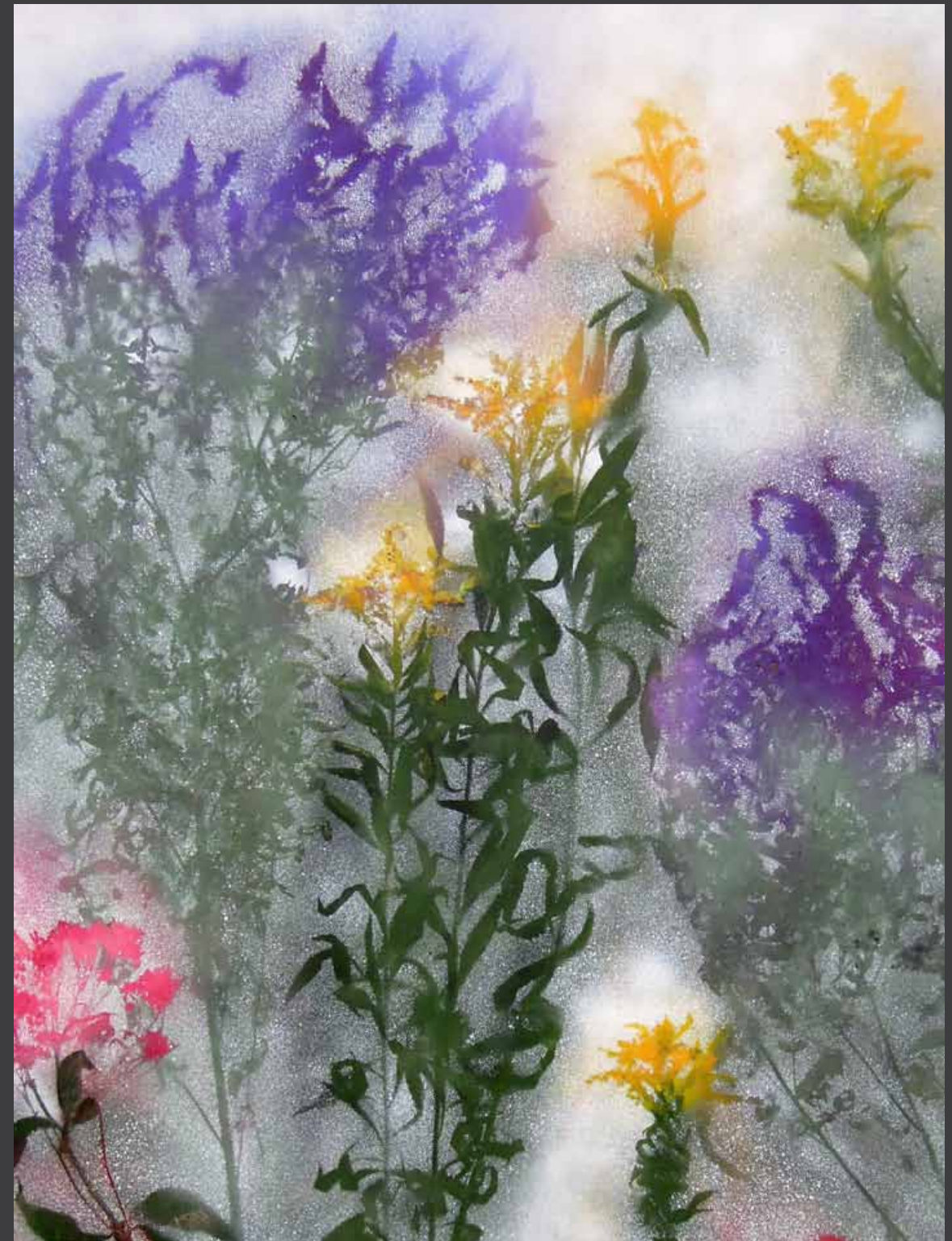
2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Petticoat Creek Wildflowers**

2016 Toronto, Canada

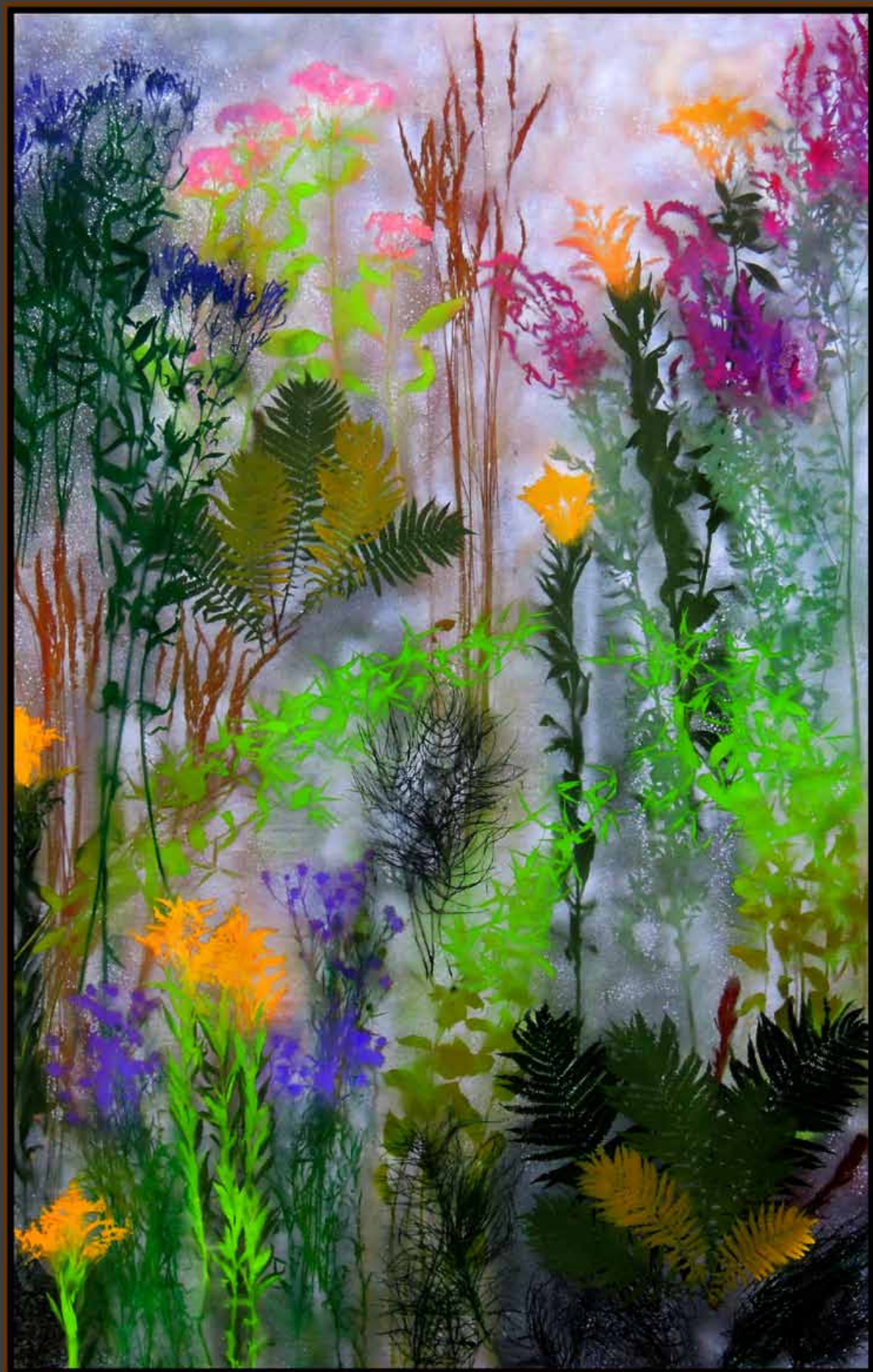
aerosol enamel on canvas

2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)

detail





**Duffins Creek Wildflowers**

2015      Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

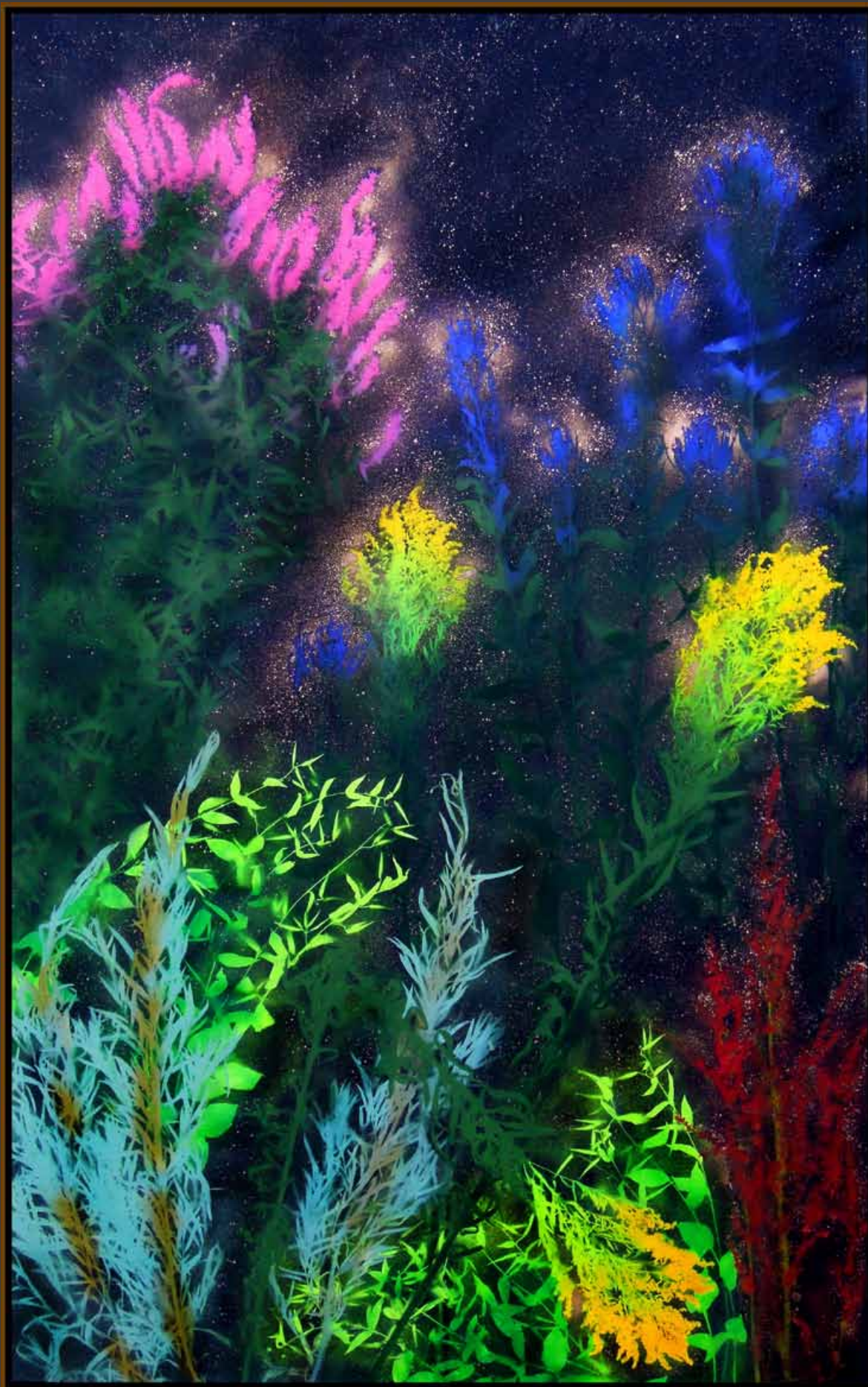
2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Carruthers Creek Wildflowers**

2015 Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

2.44 x 1.55 m / 96 x 60 in / 8 x 5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail

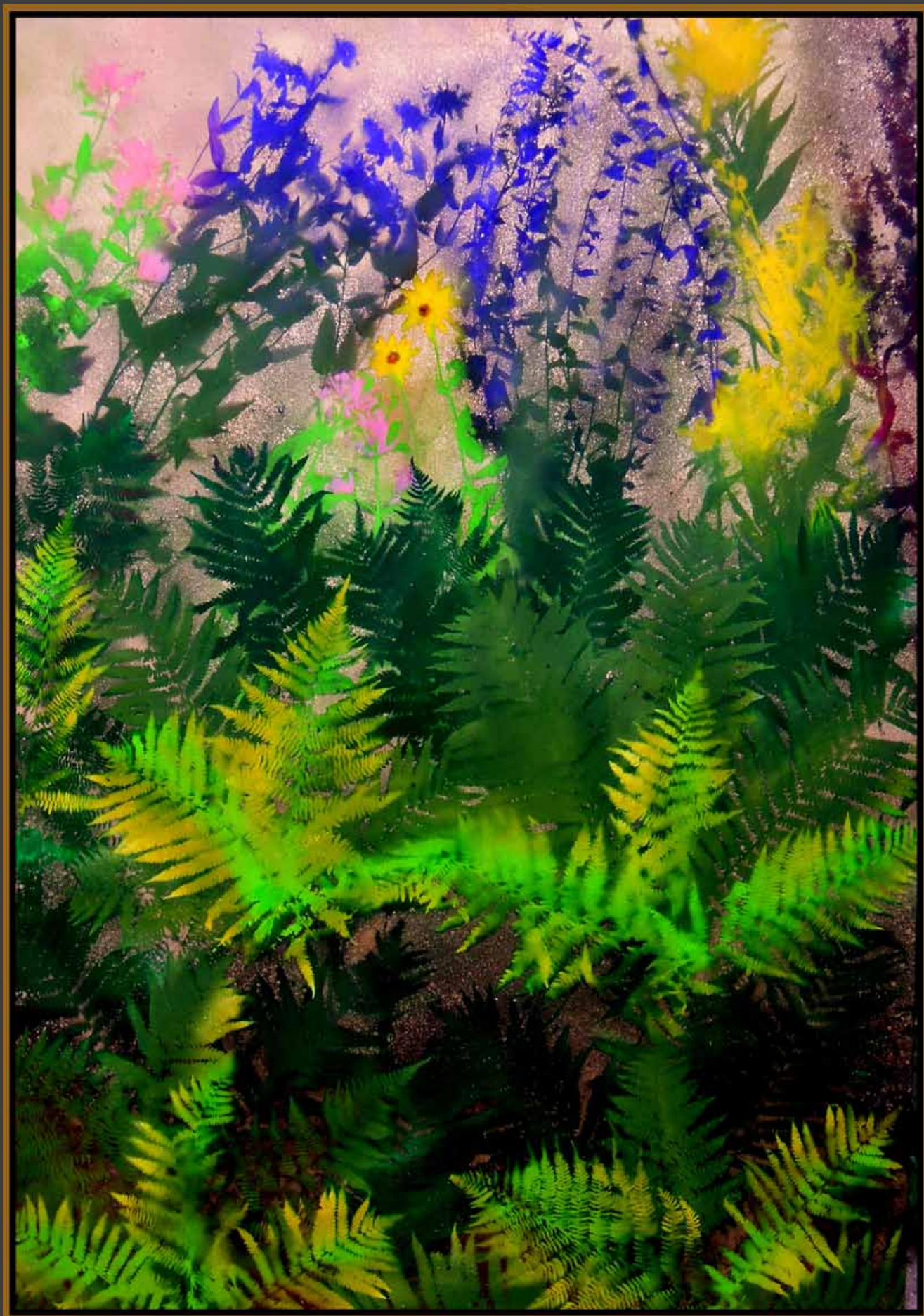


s m a l l e r

**NINE RIVERS**  
**R O M A N C E**

f l o r a l  
l a n d s c a p e s





**Highland Creek Wildflowers I**

2014

Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

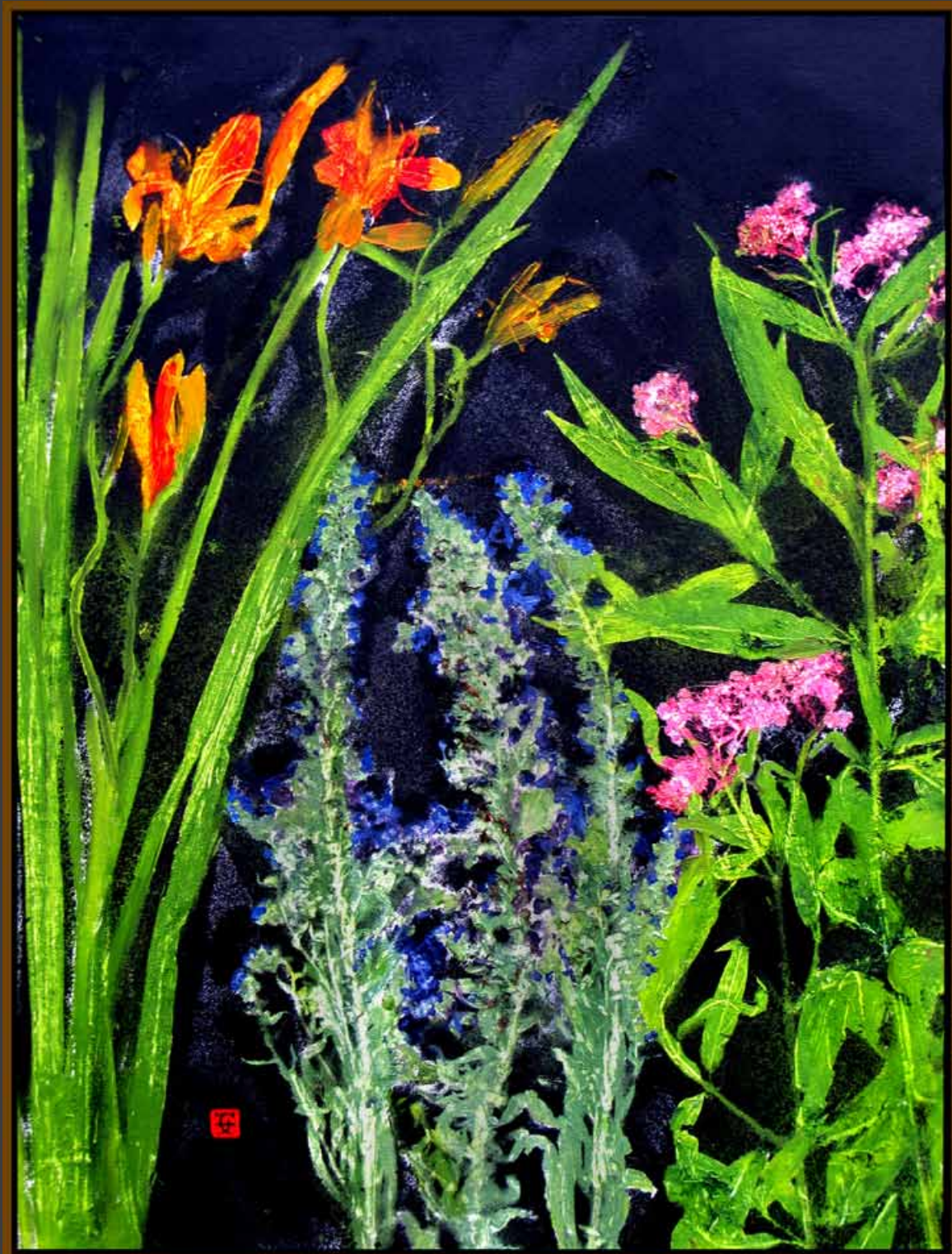
1.55 x 1.07 m / 60 x 42 in / 5 x 3.5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





**Don River Wildflowers Diptych**

2012 Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel, oil on canvas

76 x 56 cm / 30 x 22 in each

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Don River Wildflowers Triptych**

2011 Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

1.17 x .76 m / 46 x 30 in. each --- 1.17 x 2.34 m / 46 x 92 in. overall

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Humber River Wildflowers II**

2007 Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

1.73 x 1.22 m / 68 x 48 in / 5.6 x 4 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)



detail





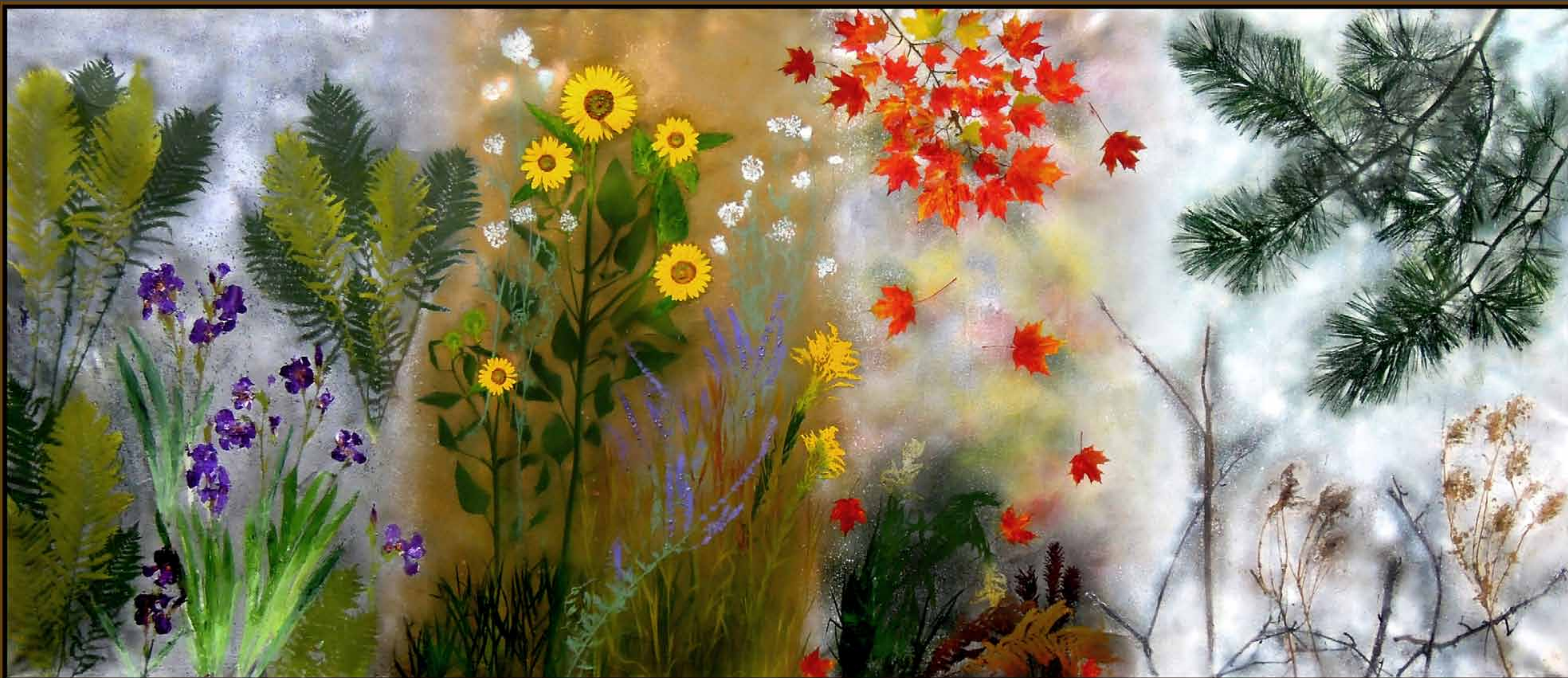


s e l e c t e d

**IMPRESSIONS**

f l o r a l  
l a n d s c a p e  
p a i n t i n g s





**Four Seasons at Once**

2015 Toronto, Canada

[\[More Images\]](#)

[Four sections, each painted during the respective season over one year on a single canvas]

oil, metallic aerosol enamel on canvas

1.53 x 3.66 m / 60 x 144 in / 5 x 12 ft



# IMPRESSIONS

## aerosol enamel and oil on canvas paintings

Floral landscape paintings created with an original, experimental technique employing natural plants and flowers from the immediate vicinity in a process revealing very detailed impressions of flora at true life-size, one-to-one scale.

Created *en plein air* amongst the flowers, the paintings result from local conditions, close observation and meditation, ancient principles, applied skill, and accidental chance.

A painting program evolving with increasing scope and scale on canvas in Canada, which developed from smaller works on paper produced in Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

Informed by decades-long study and practice of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy; employing a Western art materiality and experimental process; transcending artificial dualities of East and West, traditional and contemporary, real and representational.



**Wild Ginger Flowers**

2004

Chingdong, Taiwan

aerosol enamel on paper on board

1.22 x .91 m / 48 x 36 in. / 4 x 3 ft.

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Irises & Ferns**

2015 Toronto, Canada oil, metallic aerosol enamel on canvas

[\[More Images\]](#)



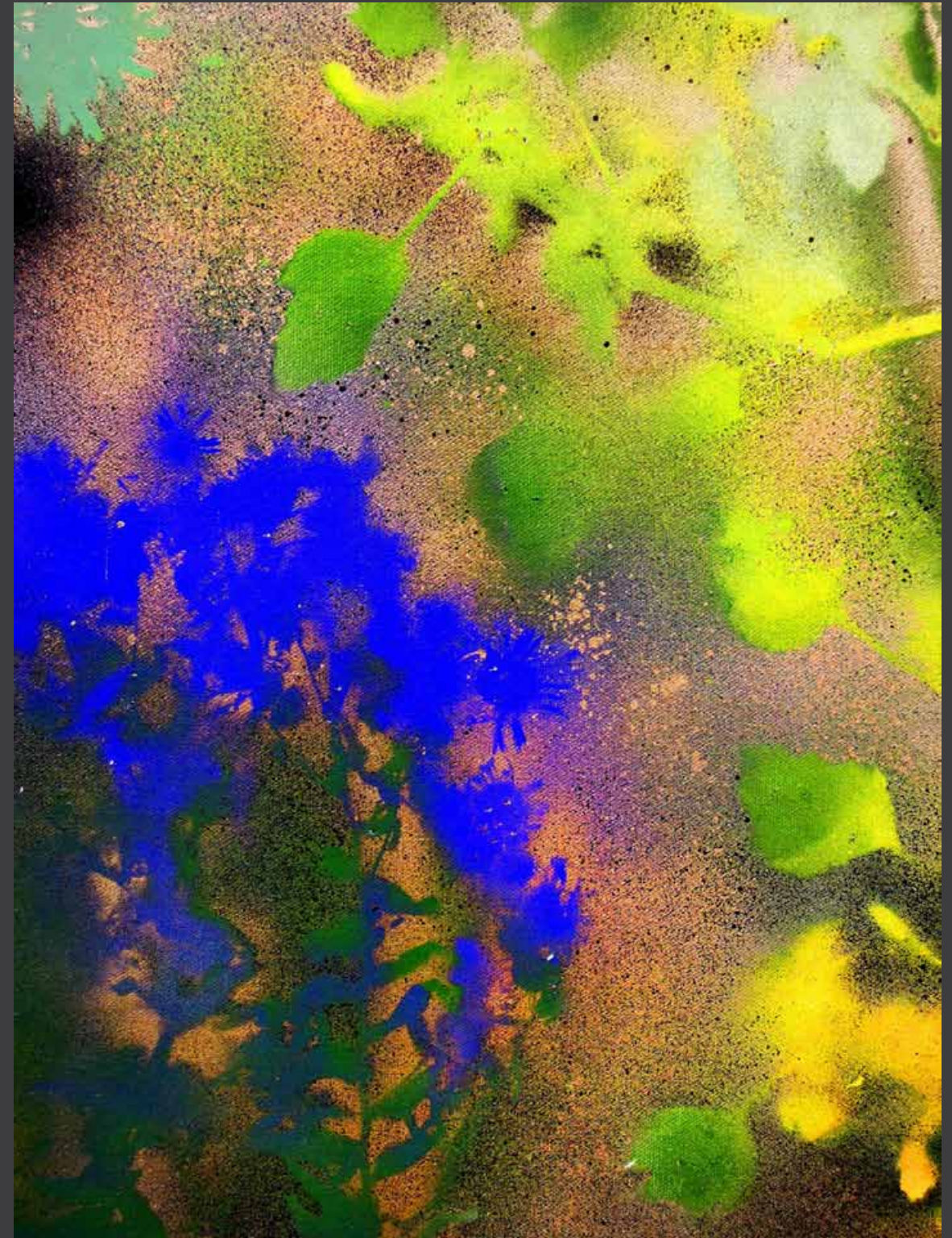
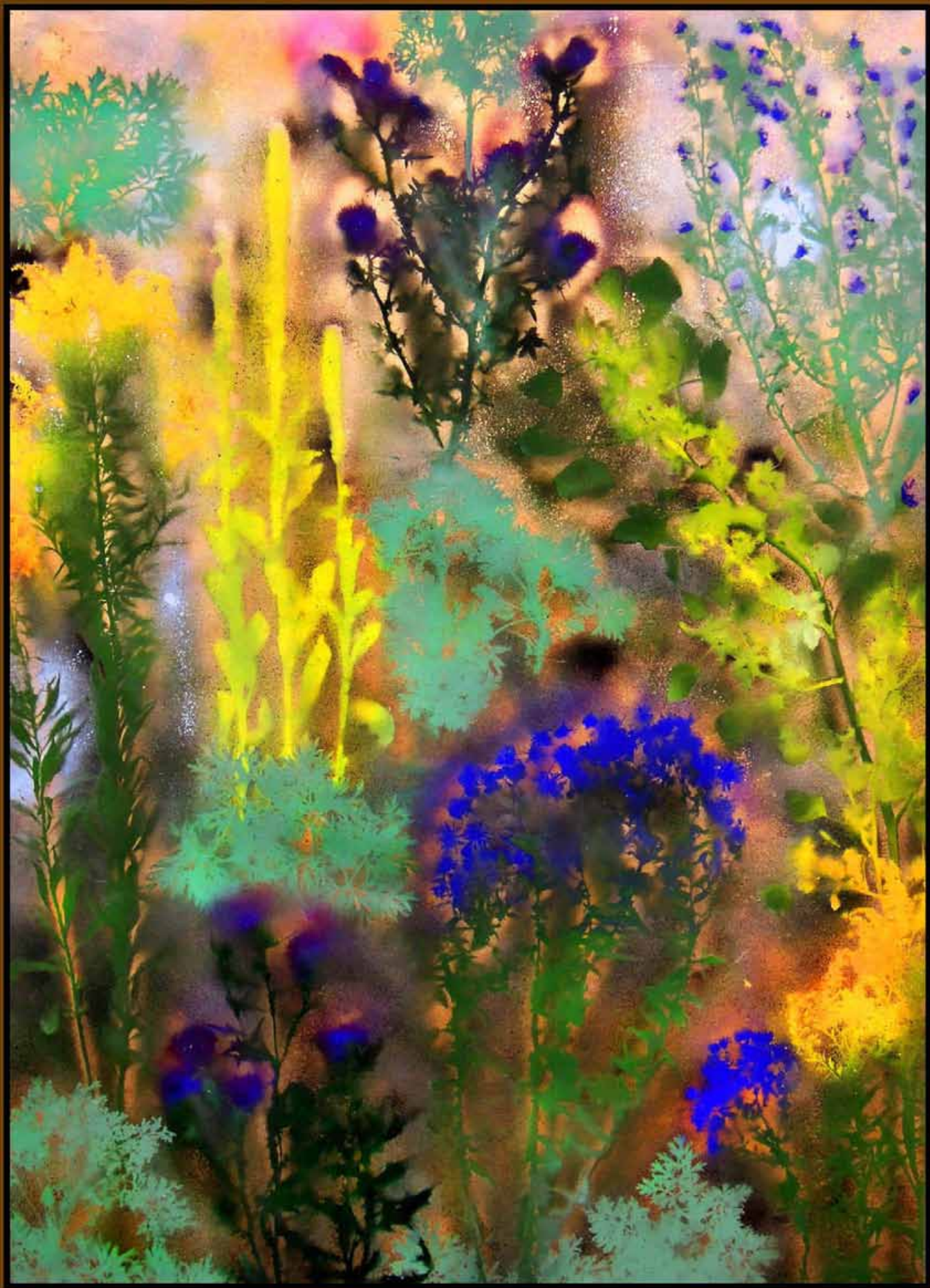
**Daylilies, Capanula & Ferns**

1.53 x .91 m / 60 x 36 in / 5 x 3 ft each



**Sunflowers, Lavender & Queen Anne's Lace**





**Wolfe Island Wildflowers**

2014

Wolfe Island, Canada

aerosol enamel, metallic gold, flora on canvas

1.52 x 1.09 m / 60 x 43 in. / 5 x 4.5 ft.

detail

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Daylilies**

2014      Toronto, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

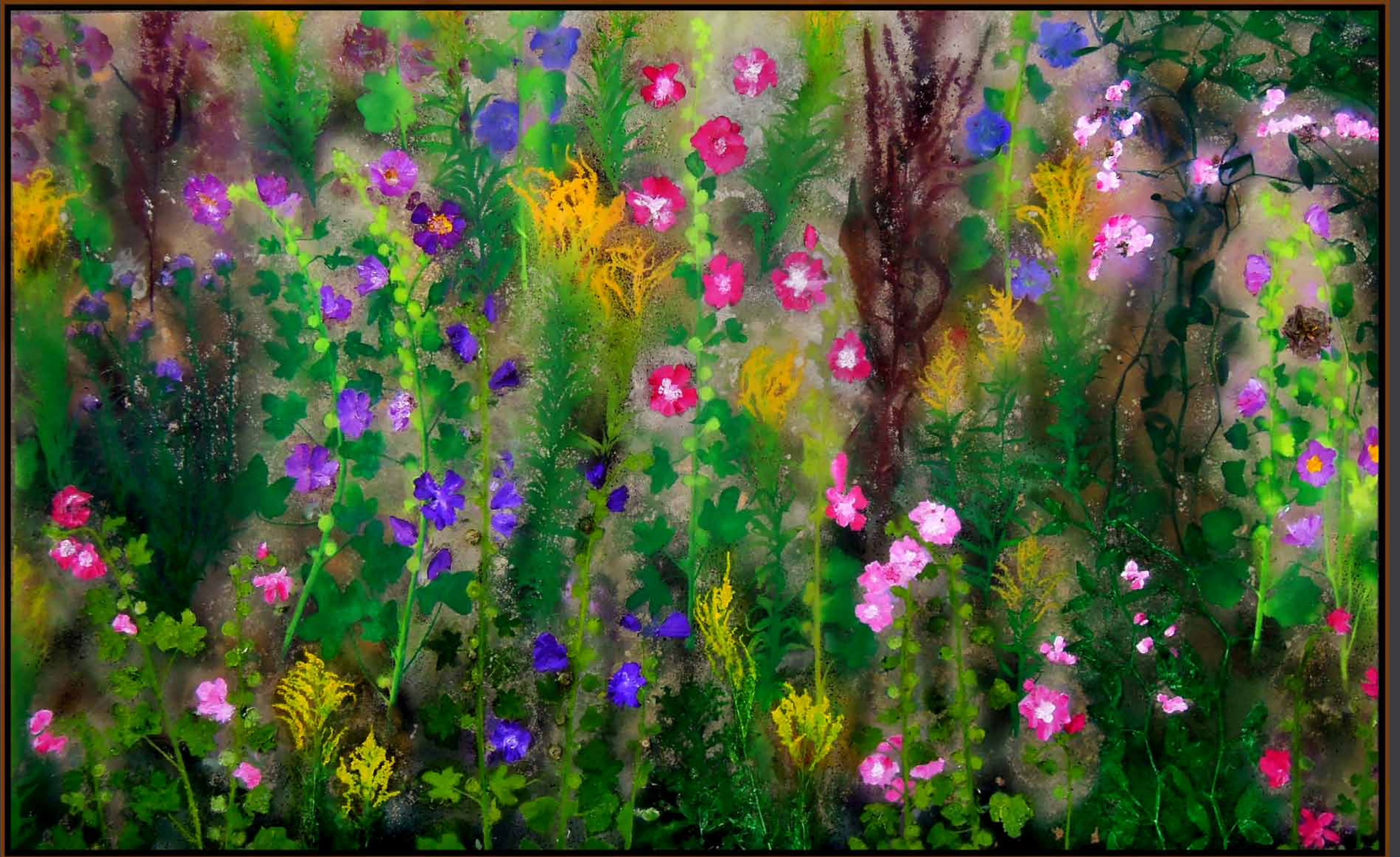
1.52 x 1.52 m / 60 x 60 in. / 5 x 5 ft.

[\[More Images\]](#)

detail







**Secret Garden**

2013      Ontario, Canada

aerosol enamel, oil, and flora on canvas

1.55 x 2.44 m / 60 x 96 in / 5 x 8 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Scotch Mountain Wildflowers [Diptych]**

2012

Ontario, Canada

aerosol enamel, oil on canvas

1.53 x .91 m / 60 x 36 in / 5 x 3 ft each

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Whack Colour Wildflowers**

2011      Ontario, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

1.52 x 2.29 m / 60 x 90 in / 5 x 7.5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Pacific Spirit Ferns**

2011

Vancouver, Canada

aerosol enamel on canvas

1.52 x 2.29 m / 60 x 90 in / 5 x 7.5 ft

[\[More Images\]](#)





**Three Friends of Winter** 歲寒三友

2008 Vancouver, Canada

[\[More Images\]](#)

[After 趙孟堅 Zhao Mengjian, 13th century China]

aerosol enamel on canvas

79 x 1.07 m / 31 x 42 in

[\[Three Friends of Winter by Zhao Mengjian at ChinaOnlineMuseum.com\]](#)



## REVIEWS



ANDREW OWEN A01 Photo-cubic  
Punks Portrait Tableau 2009 -10  
Multiple format photographic  
prints, 112 frames 2.06 x 3.66 m

VANCOUVER  
MARION SCOTT GALLERY

## ANDREW OWEN A01

by Timothy Taylor

Andrew Owen's basic idea is elusive. But then that's exactly the core of Andrew Owen's basic idea: that a great deal eludes us, perhaps nowhere more than in the consumerized West. We live, asserts Owen (who also goes by the name A01) - via the impressive range of work that comprises his first solo show in Canada in almost 20 years - on the twilight side of a yawning subjectivity gap, a chasm of personal and cultural bias that separates us from the truth about...well, just about anything.

Art objects are crucial in this analysis, of course with the subjectivities of both artist and the viewer contributing to a permanently flawed communication. How to conquer that? This is in effect what Owen asks. His answer: to get the artist out of the way to whatever degree possible. Each work in this show represents a discrete attempt on Owen's part to do so.

I say "elusive" because the idea takes some teasing out. At first glance, the show incorporates work so varied in terms of media and aesthetic tone - from floral paintings to fragmented photographic collage to repurposed ad-covered hoardings - that it would be easy enough to conclude that three or four artists

were involved. But it's all Owen, and all in the same conceptual key. Once we sense this harmonization, the body of work transmutes satisfyingly from multifarious to cohesive.

**The floral *Impressions* are field compositions, positive stencils made by building up successive layers of paint and wildflowers on the canvas. Traces of the plants and flowers used in the process remain, paint ghosts in under the leaves and the works have been subject to the whims of wind and other conditions in the field. The flowers have been allowed, in effect, to speak for themselves.**

In the photo collages, Owen take a diametrically different approach. Using a technique he describes as "photo-cubic," he delivers portraits - of flowers or groups of people - by rendering them via a barrage of different views. This method reaches its most complete expression in a large work called *Photo-cubic Punks: Portrait Tableaux*. This piece, which depicts a group of punks assembled on a stoop in Toronto's Kensington Market, is a collage, not of objects, but of available perspectives. It's designed not to bridge the subjectivity gap, in other words, but to erect a sign that reads, roughly, *mind the gap*.

# A01

## Andrew Owen A01 & Sheila Yihua Hu

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### LINKS:

10 min. documentary released by NOW Toronto:

[Lovers and Fighters, Ep., 1: Andrew Owen A01](#)

Portfolio of recent artworks: [A01 ART NOW PDF](#)

Print media: [Reviews, Articles, Catalogues](#)

Related web links: [Related Links](#)

Online archive: [A01creative.com](http://A01creative.com)

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