

THE ARTS

Visual arts, literature,
theater, music & more

'Vital to the human experience' *Two fishers continue to create art out of their working lives*

By DWIGHT CASWELL

For 400 years, George Wilson's family has fished commercially out of Portknockie, on Scotland's Moray Firth. He followed into the family business, and he also went to art school. Moe Bowstern studied creative writing and journalism at Northwestern University in Illinois, then became a commercial fisher just to show the men that a woman could do the work. She also became a poet, and when, in 2008, her zines were exhibited at Peacock Visual Arts in Aberdeen, Scotland, she met the artist they called "fisherman George." Within weeks they were a couple.

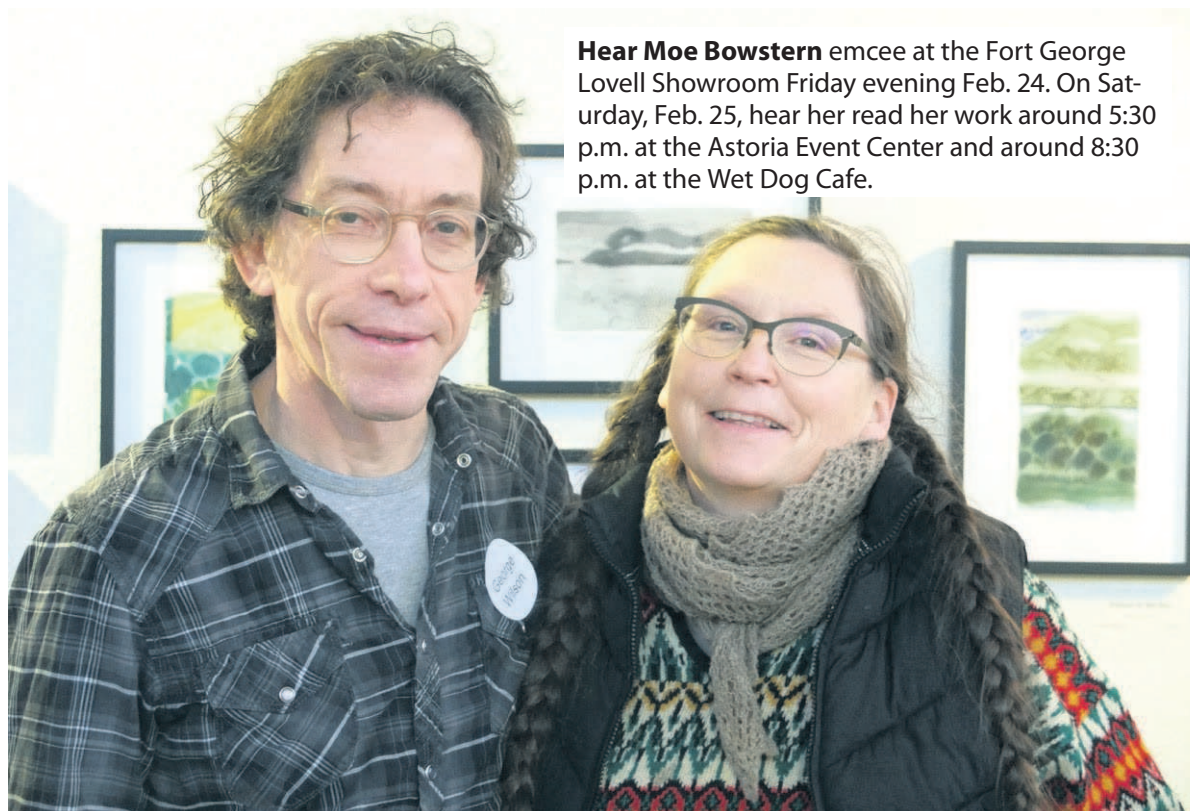
"The circus came to town, and I ran away with it," says Wilson.

Bowstern says she and Wilson are "open to each other's schedules." They collaborate on productions of the Paper Eclipse Puppet Company (yes, they do shadow puppet shows too). When Wilson is exhibiting his paintings, she provides support for him, and when she's overwhelmed as a fisherpoet, he provides the help she needs.

This month, you can see Wilson's paintings at Imogen Gallery and hear Bowstern read her poetry at the FisherPoets Gathering.

Wilson's paintings are small watercolor jewels (the largest are 7-by-9 inches). Many are almost monochromatic, evocative of mist and rain, a background out of which a blue boat may materialize, or a green island, a smudge of dawn, or a red roof at a fish camp. Skiffs and birds are small in an Alaskan landscape that is suggested more than represented. One might expect the size of the paintings to limit these landscapes, but Wilson manages to authentically convey the scale.

The works are like Chinese and Japanese paintings, which Wilson has studied, in which form is more



Hear Moe Bowstern emcee at the Fort George Lovell Showroom Friday evening Feb. 24. On Saturday, Feb. 25, hear her read her work around 5:30 p.m. at the Astoria Event Center and around 8:30 p.m. at the Wet Dog Cafe.

PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

View watercolors by artist and fisherman George Wilson at Imogen Gallery, and hear poetry by writer and fisherwoman Moe Bowstern at various downtown Astoria venues during the FisherPoets Gathering.

important than perspective. "I like their quality and simplicity," he says, "the way a landscape can be translated into a painting so it all fits together in shapes."

All of the watercolors in the Imogen show "Uganik Bay" were painted during seven weeks in the summer of 2016 when Wilson worked setting nets on Kodiak Island's Uganik Bay in Alaska. Most of them were painted during his spare time in the fading light after a day's fishing. "It was the first time I'd concentrated on art since art school," says Wilson, "It was my first art residency."

Bowstern took her first job in commercial fishing in 1986, at the age of 18, and was told that she would never make it. Four

ARTIST RECEPTION

'Uganik Bay'
4 to 6 p.m. Friday, Feb. 24
Imogen Gallery
240 11th St., Astoria

years later, a freshly minted writer without a job, she decided to go back to Alaska "to prove those guys wrong," she says. "I like being challenged on so many levels." She wrote her first fishing poem in 1990, while working as a deckhand.

In 1995 Bowstern fished her first six-month season, living in a

rented "leaky hovel" that attracted a number of musicians and artists. She kept an "art box" in the tiny entry to the hovel, and all visitors were asked to either take or leave a piece of art. When the season ended, she took the contents home with her as inspiration for her first zine, XTRA TUF NO. 1. In 1998, Bowstern read her work at the first FisherPoets Gathering. Today, most of her writing goes into her zines, and much of her time is spent reciting her poetry at one venue or another.

"When I'm fishing, a lot of stuff is happening in my head," Bowstern says. "It's a long season and a small boat, so I write poems and sometimes songs." Like Wilson, she has combined art and com-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"Shearwaters, Uganik Island" a watercolor on paper by George Wilson.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"Across the Bay," a watercolor by George Wilson.

mercial fishing. "Fishing is such a visceral experience," she says. "In a time when people are building bigger houses and spending more time inside them, we're exposing people to the outside, to simplicity. It eases people."

Bowstern has written poems since childhood, and Wilson still remembers the thrill he felt when his first drawing, done at the age of 5, was tacked to the wall by a teacher. Decades later, the two are still creating art out of their working lives, writing and painting in the certainty that, as Bowstern puts it, "art is vital to human experience."