Several years ago I read “Every second breath we take is thanks to plankton”. Until then I hadn’t given a thought to plankton even though I am in my element when I’m in or near the ocean.

Having learned that plankton forms the base of the food chain in marine ecosystems and that for the most part, it’s invisible to the naked eye, I set out to learn about and draw it.

Over the last several years, I’ve produced a series of paintings titled *The Importance of Plankton* with the thought that if we can’t see something we tend not to care about it.
Plankton, from the Greek word meaning to drift or wander, are organisms that are carried by currents and tides and are unable to self propel well enough to move against these forces.

Phytoplankton remains near the surface and converts the sun's rays into energy, takes in carbon dioxide and produces oxygen - every second breath we take.

Plankton comprises phytoplankton (plants) and zooplankton (animals).
Zooplankton includes microscopic animals, juvenile fish and invertebrates and jellies.

They tend to hang out in deeper waters during the day to avoid predation and rise to the surface during the night to feed on phytoplankton.

Zooplankton are in turn eaten by other zooplankton and larger animals up the food chain.

My plankton series celebrates these largely invisible organisms, illustrating their beauty and drawing attention to their key role in our oceans.
I’ve had wonderful conversations with knowledgeable people, some of them marine researchers, as well as newbies to plankton, who like me a few years ago, had no idea about these organisms.

One of my favourite conversations about plankton was with my then-six year old granddaughter during a sleepover. As she was going to sleep she asked me to tell her about the plankton she’d seen in my paintings. And then last fall on her first day in grade 2, she held up a sign saying “When I grow up, I want to be a scientist who researches viruses and plankton”.

Plankton is essential to the oceans’ ecosystems.

They are very sensitive to climate change, including temperature rise, acidification caused by increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide, and pollution.

Climatic changes are expected to affect the size, growth, durability (shellfish) and distribution of plankton and the creatures that depend on them.

This is one more reason to focus our attention on slowing climate change to protect our oceans and world.