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## ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL

Art As I See It

# Artists pass the ‘audition’



By Arlene Laskey

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Photo by Norm Moore Ralph Heather, The Sentinels, original woodcut, 14 x 28, third prize winner, photo by Norm Moore

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In the spring, visual artists of the “sand plains region”, a.k.a. the former “tobacco belt,” were invited to enter the second annual Arts Country Juried Competition.

With a panel of jurors examining computer images to determine which artworks to exhibit, a curious mix of hope and trepidation

bedevils many who enter such competitions.

In this case, 57 artists hailing from Brant, Middlesex, Norfolk and Oxford counties, as well nearby cities Brantford and London, decided to accept the risk, submitting 166 images for consideration.

Jurors George Wale, Tibor Nyilasi and Andrew MacDonald selected more than 100 works by some 50 artists. Together they comprise the multi-faceted exhibition that remains on view at the Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant until July 7.

Those attending the June 22 reception and award ceremony appreciated the effectiveness of the installation by Glenhyrst curator Bryce Kanbara and assistant Brian Pickering.

As per Kanbara's intention, each wall was "visually engaging and comfortable" so that "each piece could be seen on its own terms".

During opening remarks, the incoming curator spoke of his pleasure in discovering and spending time with work by the exhibiting artists, many of whom were new to him.

At the reception that pleasure was shared by those present - artists, family and friends, art enthusiasts, gallery staff, as well as Arts Country representatives Deirdre Chisholme and Adam Veri who joined jurors George Wale and Tibor Nyilasi in celebrating the depth and breadth of the exhibit.

Area artists exhibiting include Aaron Robbins, Aliko Mikulich, Debora Kortlandt, Holly O. (Ounapuu), Jack Jackowitz, Karen Nonnecke, Keith Shearsby, Lily Crawford, Linda Vahahey Sinke, Pat Megraw, Patrick Carson, Ralph Heather, Robert Crosby. My work is also on exhibit.

Two of the top prizes went to local artists. Keith Shearsby received first prize for "Ball," one of his three droll "Useful Things" on display. Ralph Heather took third prize for his skilfully rendered original woodcut print "The Sentinels."

Second prize went to Norfolk artist Garry Walker for "Let's Go for a Ride," a clever and carefully crafted small scale painted wood carving of a car door with workable window.

Each of these award winners' works display the technical virtuosity, thoughtful consideration of form and content, and expressive originality which makes them exemplars of excellence.

Jurors Wale, Nyilasi and MacDonald felt compelled to acknowledge three additional artists with certificates of merit.

These went to Jim Jackson for his acrylic work "Strange Creatures", OCAD student Sierra Barber for her beeswax coated sculptural garment titled "My Shirt", and Michael Hunter for his oil on plywood work, "Beating the Storm".

While the exhibit as a whole rewards the attentive gallery goer, certain works stand out among the wide range of two- and three-dimensional offerings from established and emerging artists.

In Gallery One, Miia Virtasalmi's whimsical glass and found object tea time assemblage called "Yellow Roses" amuses as does Jeremy Hayes' colourful folk art construction "Relaxing in the Trophy Den".

Hayes has crafted a smiling snake which smokes while recounting stories of bagging the creatures whose skulls decorate the walls of his den.

Holly O's "Hydrangea Love" is a big smack of luscious colour and texture over the mantle.

In Gallery Two, Karen Nonnecke's three subtly configured abstract acrylic panels are tribute to organic energy.

They are followed down the wall by Debora Kortlandt's heavily textured oil painting "Storm Brewing over Long Point" and then punctuated by the serenity of "Cedar Line" a digital photograph by Alysia Avey.

Aliko Mikulich's found stone and metal "Rabbit" is engaging as are her two unconventional found material whirligigs titled "Fish Mill" and "Twitter Mobile". These three occupy a substantial sculpture block opposite Jack Jackowitz's self style "Post-Impressionism" digitally enhanced photographs of local heritage sites.

In the upper hall, Patrick Carson's "Eva – Havana" pulses with raw energy. A few steps away, Garry Walker's quirky "Chanticleer" and "Crow Conversation" keep company with his prize winning "Let's Go for a Ride".

Colour abounds in Gallery Three upstairs where there are several impressive works to get lost in.

There is literally something for every taste or medium preference in this exhibit.

There are drawings and paintings and sculptural works and constructions... sophisticated works and those that are born of the simple joy of manipulating paint and other materials await.

There is wit and whimsy and satire, sentiment and social concern. Some works have literary influences and others reference a breadth of art historical knowledge.

There is much to recall with pleasure about this juried exhibit, but, for this writer, it is Keith Shearsby's arresting creations which knock most often on memory's door.

Wry humour and obvious intellect inform his superbly crafted "Useful Things".

On the wall to the right of his prizewinning "Ball", Shearsby's "Cane" has a small caster instead of a steadying rubber tip. With newfound potential for gliding movement, a bicycle bell becomes ironically sensible.

For his "12 lb Sledge", an impressive head of found steel incongruously tops a shaft of clumped tiger lily stalks bound and coated with acrylic – useful indeed!

But it is the prize-winning giant red, white and blue "Ball" which keeps resurfacing in memory – perhaps because of its scale and idiosyncracies as well as its association with childhood experience.

It is 30 inches in diameter, not fist-sized as the ones I knew, and instead of being ready to bounce or roll, it is affixed to three oppositional casters!

Shearsby says it is "the signature piece in this body of work."

It is "the very symbol of play." Its two basic functions are that it "should roll and it should bounce," though, ironically, it can do neither.

The wheels which should help it roll actually make it "incapable of either rolling or bouncing..." since "the axles of (the) casters are not vertical (and) resist turning.... these three casters are fighting each other."

Like Shearsby's other works, "Ball" addresses "the idea of usefulness and how it affects both our perception of ourselves and of the world around us".

A lively post opening discussion of the potential implications of Shearsby's work brought out questions about our human impulse to "make things better". Sadly, our intended progress often creates a long term hindrance to our well being.

Entering a juried competition is rather like taking part in an audition. Shearsby's intriguing work not only passed the audition, but has been given a starring role.

Everything on display also made it through the audition. Just "making it in" can be a worthwhile experience for both experienced artists and for novices who have not yet faced the challenges of seeking and arranging exhibitions.

Acceptance helps build an artist's CV. As well there is the hope for an objective and informed appraisal of one's progress as an artist.

Still, it must be borne in mind that what one juror or jury finds outstanding, another may find ordinary.

George Wale offered some observations about his experience as juror: "It is always a pleasure to serve and a privilege to share in the assessment and decision-making process."

His decades deep knowledge and experience as artist, art educator, curator, juror, and long time arts programming co-ordinator for the Burlington Arts Centre informed his role as juror for this competition.

He spoke of the importance of being available to dialogue with artists, to offer access to the thought processes and selection criteria used by the jurors.

He reflected on the level of care jurors must bring to their deliberations and of his pleasure in discovering that our cultural community is presently as diverse and rich as the submissions proved.

This idea of jurors and curators being truly "present," of talking about the art with the artists and with the public, was also endorsed by curator Kanbara.

The proof of any pudding is in the eating, and Kanbara invites artists and arts interested persons to attend what he is calling a "walk about/ talk about" exhibition event Thursday, June 27, at 7:30 pm.

Why not take this opportunity? Go to Glenhyrst this evening. Review and discuss the exhibit, particular artworks and the jury process with the jurors and the curator whose decisions made this show what it is.

Arlene Laskey is an artist, art educator and art appreciator who lives and works in Brantford.

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**kitjulian1**

Thank you Arlene for capturing the feel, motion, dedication and sheer energy of the combined work of these artists. You translate from artist's visions to art appreciator's imaginations in an accessible and clever language. This second "Arts Country" collaboration has launched a tsunami of interaction, excitement and collegiality that will only make us better and stronger as an arts community.

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