

# Art exhibition interesting and well presented

by Brenda Birley

"Very Canadian" is the comment the Cardin family of Fort St. John made in regards to the Canadian Heart and Soil Juried Art Exhibition. Mr. and Mrs. Batterham of Australia added, "It is extremely interesting and well presented".

April Ingham, Peace Gallery North curator, was very impressed with the participation of artists in the show as well as the comments of people who attended the opening.

More than 50 works ranging from hand coiled pots to bead work, glass art, hand carved wooden ducks and paintings will be on display at the Gallery until August 3.

Three judges worked for three hours on Saturday, determining who would receive the awards of excellence. According to the jurors, "Prayer Circle by Ken Cameron was a unanimous choice. The images not only tell the powerful stories of native people, but have universal associations."

The Land and Dreams by Betty Kovacic also received an award of excellence. This painting complimented Cameron's native perspective by expressing the images and colors of the



Canadian Heart and Soil Award of Excellence displayed at Peace Gallery North.

Photo by Brenda Birley

immigrant history in Canada. Arctic Sky, a photograph by Brechin Maclean was chosen for the Gallery's permanent collection. "It speaks of the spiritual connection we have to the land, sea and sky" wrote the Jurors in their statement

In addition to looking at the many creations, the public was invited to participate in the interactive display. "The taste of Canada buffet blew away my expectations" said Ingham as she

recalled the sugar pies of Quebec and the cream cheese balls of Winnipeg.

"We have a tapestry set up for anyone who comes into the Gallery to add their impressions of Canada" said Ingham. There is also a sitting area set up where individuals can watch selected videos.

While the opening attracted many viewers on July 19th, the show will be open for viewing until August 5th.

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## Jurors' Statement

### Prayer Circle by Ken Cameron

This finely executed soap-stone sculpture was a unanimous choice. The images not only tell the powerful stories of native people, but have universal associations.

### The Land and Dreams by Betty Kovacic

We are a country of immigrants and almost all of us can relate to the images, stories, textures and colours in this piece. How we feel about the country is coloured by our personal histories.

These pieces complement each other in showing the two different Canadian backgrounds - those of us immigrants and the native people.

### Arctic Sky by Brechin Maclean

This is a natural choice for the permanent collection. A photographic image is interpretive to the viewer only. It speaks of the spiritual connection we have to the land, sea and sky. It even suggests famous artistic renderings of Canadian landscapes. I am sure I see a Lawren Harris-like mountain.

### **Jurors:**

Anna Eichelberger - Taylor, B.C., artist / art educator

Emily Mattson - Rolla, B.C., artist

Lisa Bush - Fort St. John, B.C., art writer

Last week, I had the honor and awesome responsibility of being one of the jurors in the *Canadian Heart & Soil* art exhibition that opened at Peace Gallery North on Saturday evening. It may be interesting and educative to give an apologia of the process by which we arrived at our final decisions.

The general judging criteria were established beforehand and outlined in the artist entries. These criteria were “successful and cohesive reflection on the theme, strength of message or idea, and composition and technical achievement within the work.” With these guidelines in mind, we began to acquaint ourselves with the works.

I would have despaired of ever narrowing down the choices to two if it had not been for the opinions and viewpoints of the other jurors. Even so, I wondered if the same works would be able to speak to our disparate backgrounds. I could only begin by finding the works that spoke to me in my understanding of what it means to be Canadian and hope that some of those would move the other jurors in the same way.

Space allows me to mention only a few of the pieces that caught my attention. One of the first works I saw was a collection created by Barb McBeth. She portrays the four seasons on dresses made out of bits of colored paper. We are a people who are identified with and influenced by the extremes of our weather. Weather, itself, speaks of diversity and change, and our adaptability to it. What I found especially interesting was the artist’s position in showing national identity as a kind of apparel that is worn over our individual identity.

Another piece that is hard to miss is a huge one by Bryan Haab, titled “Cumulative Genesis.” Besides it being a wonderfully evocative portrait of a worker of the land, it shows incredible skill and craftsmanship in both carving and painting.

There were a couple of pieces that were presented as triptychs. In these, I found myself pondering the timely Canadian question about whether the individual pieces could stand on their own or how the rest of the collection would be diminished by the absence of any part. “Synergy,” by Graham Cook, showed the definitive answer to



this political side of ourselves. His acrylic painting shows a forest of Canadian flags and *fleur de lis*. In his artist's statement he writes "The forest started from seed and the roots run deep. We need all the trees to make a forest." There is a delicate balance portrayed here, as one is equally struck by both the similarities and the differences of the individual members.

There are other pieces that would stand out in any show. Peace River artist, Geri France, has contributed two glass works of such intricate detail that each could be contemplated for a very long time. One is an undulating cityscape and the other portrays the diversity of living things in a small pond.

One especially curious piece is a cibachrome photograph taken by Brechin Maclean, titled "The Amazing Moose." The moose's feat in climbing a diagonal 150 foot glacial deposit of sand and gravel is as amazing as the photo itself. The image of the moose gives it orientation, dimension and reality. Without the creature, it would seem surreal. Perhaps it is the Rorschach test appearance of this piece, but I can even see a Christ-like image in the land formations.

To get back to my Confessions Of An Art Show Juror, though, takes me to meeting again with the other jurors to compare notes. Perhaps I should not be so surprised at how similar our choices were. All three of us were struck by how the sculpture by Ken Cameron so comprehensively fulfilled the selection criteria. Not only does "Prayer Circle" show the history, heritage and hopes of native cultures, but suggests a multicultural balance in its yin and yang qualities.

It was not until well into our selection process that we realized how much Betty Kovacic's piece, "The Land and Dreams," could complement our first decision. This multi-media painting is filled with reminders of where most Canadians come from. It is the story of the immigrant that is so much a part of us. Canadians are often accused of being unwilling or unable to define our identity. I find an interesting answer to this in a fragment of a letter incorporated in the painting. The writer asks her immigrant father how he felt in leaving behind all those he cared about and coming to Canada with little to get him started. "He replied that it was not a time for feeling, but a

time for doing." Perhaps we are too busy being Canadian to think about who we are exactly.

Our final task was to give a recommendation for a piece to be purchased as part of the gallery's permanent collection. Brechin Maclean has captured the image of Canada to which we must all respond. Yes, it is often a land of ice and snow, but we see diversity, immutability and fluidity all at once. The dominant feature in Maclean's photo is the sky, and how it interacts with the other elements of land and water. There is a spiritual quality to this piece that would be recognizable to all Canadians, I am sure.

It is not mere consolation when I say that all the contributors to *Canadian Heart & Soil* are deserving of honor for their excellence. The creators of the 58 works of art should be proud of their achievements.