

Art Gallery of Bancroft presents Invocation

Artist Laura Culic credits her motorcycle for introducing her to Hastings Highlands and in particular, Maynooth.

The winding roads and Sun Run Cafe in Maynooth. It just struck me what an amazing town this was and I was drawn here. And when I found this house for sale, just over a year ago, I wasn't even looking but I just had to do this. It was meant to be.

The house now is Black Spruce Art Works and features Culic's work and other artists whose works all have northern themes.

Culic is a landscape painter. She loves to paint big skies, big horizons; things in the distance. Saskatchewan is one of her favourite places to paint, but the move to Hastings Highlands changed her way of painting. She can see the impact of this locale on her work. Her paintings are rooted in where she lives; She feels she is in the woods when she paints. The environment is her muse: forests, rocks, hills and rivers.

The title of her show, Invocation that opens on April 7 at the Art Gallery of Bancroft came to her after she was invited to exhibit at the gallery. Culic was hunting for a title and decided Invocation spoke to the power of the forests in her paintings. The area invokes a response from her. She sees it as an outward force that propels her to paint the landscapes she's living in.

Photos or sketches are created on site; but she's clear that these sketches and photos are not what she paints. They are like exercises that she enjoys and finds challenging but she says she couldn't paint a place from just a photo. She has to experience the place she paints. She has to be there. The photos and sketches are springboards or inspiration for her in her studio. The paintings become their own own entities.

An artist that she especially finds inspiration from is the American painter Mark Rothko (1903 to 1970). Although Rothko refused to adhere to any art movement, he is generally identified as an abstract expressionist. With Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, he is one of the most famous postwar artists. Rothko is not a landscape artist, yet Culic finds the work resonates with her because of the layers of colour, the glow that he achieves, the inner spirituality of his work. It really moves me and gets me excited.

The artist admits that her work is messy and she's fine with that. The layering and scraping away isn't done with paint brushes. The messiness comes primarily from how the paint is manipulated with various tools.

I use blades, scrapers, spatulas, credit cards whatever I have. I score into it with pointy things pens, pine needles anything goes. I'll be shopping or hiking and think, this might be a good tool and give it a shot.

The process of adding and removing offers what Culic calls a very forgiving approach to painting. Things that don't work out they just become part of the fabric of the painting because there are so many layers. The continual layering and scraping away of the paint creates a sense of history to the paintings that reflect the nature around her strata of rock, soil, pine needles, sand, debris, things that grow and decay. That cyclical nature of the environment is part of her subconscious thinking in her process.

Culic's hope is that her paintings offer people a heightened sense of connection to or regard for the land. She says her work is not made up of dramatic scenes but a regular scene with a forest or stream. It's a special quality of light or atmosphere in the painting that she hopes the viewer will appreciate and engage in.

The workshop with artist Laura Culic, Liberate Your Landscapes: the creative process of developing personal and painterly work from your photos, takes place on April 23 at the gallery. For further information on this and other workshops, please contact Ingrid Monteith at 613-334-6965.

Invocation opens on April 7 at the Art Gallery of Bancroft at 7:30 p.m. The public is encouraged to attend and light refreshments will be served.

Submitted by Roy Mitchell