

## Art gallery celebrates local student artists



By Kaitlin Sylvester

The Art Gallery of Bancroft reopened their doors Friday, March 8 to celebrate the second Annual Juried Student Exhibition. This exhibition showcases the remarkable talents of the region's young artists, offering them a platform to display their creations to the public. The student work will be available for viewing throughout the month. The grand re-opening of the gallery was an evening filled with inspiration. The highlight of the event was the awards ceremony which recognized the outstanding achievements of the budding artists. Many of these artworks will be available for purchase, following the overwhelming response received during last year's show. Visitors of the exhibition can expect a diverse array of artistic expressions, from paintings and sculptures to mixed media. The recent closure of the gallery allowed the space to undergo a 'much-needed renovation,' said Molly Moldovan curator of the AGB. The newly refurbished exhibition space was made possible through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, making the exhibition opening a double celebration. As the event was scheduled during March Break, the AGB were not expecting a large turn out and were delighted when the expectations were proven wrong. The event was a packed house, which Moldovan said 'feels like a vindication for everything that the gallery is doing.' The selection process for the exhibition was conducted by jurors Jennifer Delaney and Lynne Vegter, both of whom will be present at the opening reception. Their task was undoubtedly challenging, given the high caliber of submissions received. Nevertheless, their keen insights and discerning eye have ensured a collection of artworks that truly captivate and inspire. During their remarks, Delaney reminded the artists that just by showing their work they had achieved something to be proud of, 'It's a bit like the Olympics. You know, between gold and bronze there's like a nanosecond. It's the participating and the creating that really makes you a winner and if you didn't win a prize, you still are all winners.' Winner of Best in Show, Annabelle Borgdorff was stunned when she was awarded the sought after prize for her surrealist piece. Of her submission she said, 'it was a school assignment . . . where we were just basically working on perspective and then I wanted to kind of add this piece of surrealism.' Annabelle's piece is a thoughtful look at the magic of everyday life that she describes as 'just the things [we miss] when we're moving so fast and . . . we just need to stop and appreciate and look closer at what's right in front of us and see the beauty.' Another stunning piece that was the topic of much discussion was a collaboration between two young artists exploring race and culture in a visually impactful way. Moldovan said 'when you get a piece like this that has been so beautifully done and at that size, it's very brave . . . it takes a lot of courage to work that size.' Many of the student submissions tackled weighty topics such as

climate change, race, personal identity. Vegtor said that she was "actually taken aback" by the quality and the topics on display, while another guest pointed out that you can see the shifts in our culture by examining what topics these students choose to cover. As guests peruse the exhibition, they will have the opportunity to cast their ballots for the People's Choice Award, which will be announced at the close of the exhibition on March 30. The goal of events like the Under 19 Annual Exhibition, said Moldovan, "extends far beyond the confines of our gallery walls. They serve as a testament to the importance of nurturing young talent and providing avenues for artistic expression." Youth initiatives like these, support the growth and development of emerging artists while fostering a sense of community. In her opening remarks, Moldovan reflected on the spirit of reconciliation, saying "true reconciliation begins with empathy, understanding and intention," and reminded those gathered that reconciliation is an active process in which the gallery is engaged. She also made a point to recognize the invaluable contributions of the dedicated volunteers, who play a pivotal role in the daily operations of the gallery, saying "their commitment and passion are the lifeblood of our organization, ensuring that our doors remain open to all who seek inspiration and connection through art." Moving forward, AGB opening receptions will be held on the first Friday of each month, providing regular opportunities for the community to engage with the arts.