

Lush Gravitas with artist Allan O'Marra



By Sara Gottardi

On Friday, Aug. 21 the multi-award winning fine artist, Allan O'Marra opened the beautiful and nostalgic Maxwell Settlement Schoolhouse for its fifth showcasing of the week for collection: Lush Gravitas. A set of portraits O'Marra had been compelled to paint, feeling drawn in by photographs he'd found around the internet on sites such as Flickr (a favourite). Gaining permission from photographers as well as candidly taken pictures taken by ordinary people he's borrowed from, O'Marra relished stating his title goal is by nearing end of the summer 2015 to have 20 portraits done which then will be setup for a grand show in a larger scale art gallery.

Lush, stark, variant and wildly different young ladies portraits to whom each resembling one another, yet at the same time strikingly contrasting in comparison beside each other are relentlessly beautiful. With similar emotional panels as an underlying pallet for each portrait, all having an undeniable and mystique difference in their mannerism of the same general emotion: seriousness and anger. O'Marra captured through photographs from all different parts of the internet [the world], the complexity and dexterity of ones emotional value.

Graduating from the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD) in 1971, having taken Communications and Design, O'Marra's keen interest for painting and photography flourished and after graduating he'd begun painting immediately. Showcasing them all around, it was a continuing passion for decades until his job in advertising and promotion was eliminated eight years prior, giving leeway in becoming a full-time artist. Having done 33 solo exhibits with another astonishing 80 group exhibitions in the

44year span of his career, O'Marra has also published numerous books such as, *Being Gentle* (1971), *See Change* (2000), *The Big Land of Quiet* (1999), *Retreat at Worst Horse* (2013), and also writing profiles for local artists in a monthly column for the *Metroland Media* in Durham Region. O'Mara said about the book, *Retreat at Worst Horse*, that it was "created from the depths of my being and my spiritual beliefs, using all of my artistic skills for writing and image creation to complete it."

Art became O'Marra's religion as he delved into talk about his favourite genres he said, "I love a wide range of art from the most minimalist abstracts to the most glorious of high realism. In each case, the work has to have presence, has to be unique and has to engage me in some fundamentally visceral way."

O'Marra feels most at home when at the old schoolhouse, saying, "the building and property in the Maxwell Settlement has been a constant in my life since I was a young child, as a physical place and the magical kingdom where I played and grew as a child and now my retreat and art studio," continuing saying, "it is the place and space where I feel most at home. The hills, lake, flora, fauna and scents and sounds all act as a profoundly embedded muse for me as an art maker. They're consistently being reflected in my paintings."

Brought up in an Evangelical Christian based home, he explained how he'd come about finding himself as a person but also as a spiritual being. After leaving home for school [OCAD] and opening himself to the new surroundings and people, finding Buddhism was a practice and belief he felt most connected to and from there would never go back to Evangelical Christianity as it felt like a "melodramatic blind faith and fear of Hell."

Not shy towards the human condition, O'Marra was also trained in transpersonal psychotherapy (one who not only helps with the emotional states of being, but with the spiritual awakening of a person). As a Buddhist, O'Marra delved into looking deeper into a persons eyes and be able to connect with them as directly as possible. To gain an understanding of who they are and what impedes them.

In 100 years, O'Marra says he wants "want people to grasp, from looking at my art, that I was someone who was caring, loving and compassionate, who wished to reflect the beauty and vitality of the world in which he lived."

You can find Allan O'Marra at: www.allanomarra.com or to purchase his works through: wallop.com and: www.satista.com.