

Student Juried Exhibition a success



By Michael Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The student juried exhibition opening ceremony at the Art Gallery of Bancroft was a resounding success on March 7, according to artist and MC Molly Moldovan. Judged by artist Henry Melissa Gordon, winners were chosen in drawing, painting/mixed media, three-dimensional work, best in show and people's choice. The best in show award was won by North Hastings High School's Andy Meyer for his work 'Curley's Party.' The exhibition runs from March 5 to 29 at the gallery at 10 Flint Street. Moldovan and Gordon comment on this special evening that celebrated student art.

Artist and MC Molly Moldovan told Bancroft This Week on March 5 that there is a long history of the AGB holding a juried student exhibition and she remembers having been invited to be a juror in the mid-1990s, after an exhibition of her work at the AGB.

'I'm not clear on when or why it was suspended but it was reinstated in 2022 or 2023. It is a labour-intensive effort, requiring a considerable number of hours of our educational outreach coordinator's time. This year's participants are between the ages of 14 and 19 and include students from North Hastings High School, Haliburton Highlands Secondary School, and home-schooled students, a total of 48 artworks submitted by 37 students,' she says.

Moldovan also mentioned that their usual volunteer caterer was available to them for the event, so she ordered a very small number of nibbles from The Grape & Wedge, a lovely little gourmet shop in Apsley.

'When I explained what it was for, they not only discounted the cost, but when I arrived to pick up the food they had also donated additional amazing trays of artisan cheeses and charcuterie, far beyond my expectation. They deserve a huge shout-out for their generosity and their support of the arts, not to mention hungry artists!' she says.

Moldovan revealed that this exhibition is sponsored by Karen and Gord Savage, long-time supporters of the AGB who are especially keen to further youth participation in the arts.

'Among this year's awards will be; first prize in drawing sponsored by Jennifer Aboui, first prize in painting/mixed media sponsored by Lisa Williams, first prize in three-dimensional work, sponsored by Jennifer Aboui, the Town of Bancroft best in show award, and

the people's choice award, sponsored by a friend of the AGB, she says.

In previous years, Moldovan says that the show is quite well received and that their own volunteers are extremely enthusiastic and pleased that they are mounting these exhibitions again.

'We all believe in the importance of art to the health of the community and that young artists are to be encouraged as much as possible,' she says.

Moldovan says that they usually invite an artist who has some background in arts education and has exhibited at the AGB in the previous year.

'This year's juror is Henry Melissa Gordon, whose exhibition 'Dream Journals' was mounted at the AGB in Oct. 2024,' she says.

Gordon told Bancroft This Week on March 5 that it was a great experience to look at all the student work and to remember when she was in high school and making the decision to pursue her passion for art.

'I had a couple of art teachers who really encouraged and inspired me and went out of their way to help me get started on my lifelong creative journey,' she says.

While Gordon was unable to be there in person, she did forward some comments which were read by Moldovan at the event. She told the students through her comments that she felt honoured to see their amazing artwork, really enjoyed the submissions and that every piece in the show had value and interest. She said that she'd seen work that covered a range that stretched from mysterious, haunting, or political to playful, quirky, and sweet and lots of unique approaches to materials and subject matter.

'When it comes to looking at, and judging artwork, people have all kinds of diverse and subjective criteria, this means it is often about our personal feelings and our personal response to the artwork. So, I wanted to tell you a bit about my criteria. It included looking at the way you handled the different materials, or the colour, or composition... Did you experiment? Take some risks? Do things in your own way? I also looked at the way your personal voice came through in the artwork... Could I know something about you: the artist, or you: the person when I looked at the artwork? Did it express your life experience or your unique perspective, hopes, fears, passion, interests, or love of creativity in some way? Sometimes when I look at art, there is just a piece that makes me say 'Oh yeah!' and that's a magical moment when all those criteria boxes are ticked!' she says.

For the first prize in the drawing category, Gordon chose 'Moments in Time' by Haliburton Highlands Secondary School student Olivia Brown. She said the work was a skillful and interesting drawing, it feels like a personal collection of objects that tells us something about the artist.

'It takes lots of drawing skill to show the different textures of hair, fabric, flowers, a screen, book cover and pages, and a ceramic mug. Great tonal range. I keep going back to the mysterious little face in the background,' she says.

Maria Korbut from NHHS got an honourable mention for her work 'Pretty Penny,' which Gordon saw as surreal, quirky, with lots of good detail.

'I like how the flow of the stairs is emulated in the flow of the dress. Great penny drawing!' she says.

The first prize in the painting and mixed media category went to HHSC student Sophia Burke's piece 'if you're so full of love, why don't you give yourself some.'

Gordon thought that it beautifully captured a quiet introspective moment.

'The composition feels right, my eye is drawn first to the figure, then to the swirling movement of the water, then the aquatic plants

that surround the scene. I love the gold highlights where the legs and arms disappear into the water. The title really deepens our understanding of the painting," she says.

There were two honourable mentions in this category; NHHS's Emma Elliot's "Untitled" work and Annika Gervais' from HHSC's work "Open Your Eyes."

For the former, Gordon was intrigued by the way Elliot created a mysterious atmosphere with unexpected colour choices.

"I am drawn to look carefully at everything in this strange room, like I am looking for clues," she says.

For the latter, Gordon thought there was great progression in Gervais' artwork, from overwhelm to anxiety to hopelessness.

"The combination of drawing and collage works well to support this powerful message!" she says.

Payton Regamey from NHHS won first prize in the sculpture category with "Canon EOS 1500D" which Gordon thought had a "pop art" feel.

"The stark black and white is visually appealing and there is something humorous and playful about the cardboard camera. I like that the cardboard cutting is a bit rough rather than precise, this adds lots to the character of this sculpture," she says.

Angus Kelly, a home-schooled student, got an honourable mention with his work "Hard Living," which Gordon thought skillfully created this organic looking surface of the starfish using metal.

"I enjoy the contrast between the strong form of the starfish and the soft, crumpled plastic netting. Great title and environmental message," she says.

Finally, the best in show category went to NHHS's Andy Meyer, for her work "Curley's Party," which Gordon thought conveyed a skillful and confident way of handling the challenges of colour, pattern and composition.

"It is a startling and bold image, a great portrait that goes beneath the surface to give us a deeper sense of the person. There are layers of symbols and meaning for the viewer to contemplate. Everything in this painting is working," she says.

Bancroft This Week reached out to Meyer's art teacher Andrew Edgar, but did not receive a reply by press time. AGB educational outreach coordinator Mary Williams said that while Meyer was unable to attend the opening, after meeting her at one of the NHHS's art class visits to the gallery, she is an aspiring artist and would be thrilled she won the Best in Show award.

"She wants to continue the arts by learning what she can in school but is also teaching herself digital art and animation to create some amazing original characters and stories in her free time," she says.

Moldovan says that the teachers are advised of the exhibition deadline at the beginning of the school year in September.

"There is frequent follow-up to ensure that everything arrives at the gallery on schedule. Once the work arrives at the gallery it is curated for placement, which usually takes a few hours, and then installed the following day by a different crew of volunteers. In this case, installation took four volunteers two hours. Other than that, sponsors - an exhibition sponsor and awards sponsors - have to be secured. Altogether, it's quite labour-intensive, but the outcome is always immeasurably rewarding," she says.

Moldovan also gave a huge thank you to NHHS teacher Andrew Edgar and HHSC teacher Karen Gervais for their ongoing, enthusiastic support of their students and of this exhibition, which made it all possible.

Moldovan told Bancroft This Week on March 8 that they had a pretty big crowd, over 75 people, which was heartening, given that it

was the start of spring break and that attendance is always unpredictable.

?There was huge enthusiasm - you can see from the photos that people were giving the work serious consideration and it was lovely to see some of the students explaining their work to their peers. One of the artworks sold just before the reception. It's obvious that some of these talented teens will be continuing their arts education. Some of the impressive artworks focus on important themes that in one way or another, touch all of us: mental health, destruction of the natural environment, coping with isolation, loss, and grief,? she says. ?Each young artist has their own way of expressing these themes, and individually, their work creates an engaging and powerful dialogue with the viewer.?