

Transitions at AGB

The Art Gallery of Bancroft will be exhibiting the work of area artist, Bob Perkins. The exhibition, Transitions, will include work that was created from his arrival in Canada to today.

Robert Perkins grew up in Chicago, but developed a deep love for the quiet and solitude of the country. Not long after graduating from Southern Illinois University in 1971 with a degree in arts and education, he moved to Ontario.

When he settled in Bancroft, he devoted himself to interpreting his new rural location through drawings and paintings. This would prove quite a change from the painting he did in Chicago where his instructors and the times were pushing for creating more abstract work. In Bancroft, he started to focus on painting wildlife and nature. "I liked it and it was what people wanted to buy and it helped pay the rent." Many people who lived in Bancroft in the late '70s and early '80s may remember seeing Perkins outside on the street drawing the area's buildings and landscapes. He said people considered him the Unofficial Bancroft Resident Artist because he was documenting the area's places and buildings - some that have burnt down and are no longer here.

In 1984, Perkins was offered the position of arts instructor at the Madawaska Valley District High School in Barry's Bay. He redesigned the arts program and in 1986 he was given the headship of the arts department at the high school. Perkins was awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence in 1997. The awards have honoured exceptional elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines since 1993, with more than 1,500 teachers honoured to date. Perkins was the first art teacher to receive the award.

Perkins loved teaching: "I had wonderful students and when I was helping them develop their ideas, I was able to develop my own. I remember leafing through a magazine while the students were working on their projects in the class and saw a science fiction image of people walking with fish floating beside them." That was the beginning of what became his fantasy fish sculptures. Some examples of his fantasy fish will be part of this exhibition.

In 2008, Perkins retired and focused his time on his own art practice.

This exhibition is in part of retrospective of his art practice stretching back over 30 years. The recent three-dimensional painting, In the Zone, depicts an older Perkins watching a younger Perkins playing pool. An accomplished pool player, Perkins sees the painting as bittersweet. He can't play pool as well as he used to because he had what he called a "heart explosion, not a heart attack" last year. He was dead for 30 minutes and on life support for two days before he came back.

Perkins believes that the title of the show, Transitions, works on many levels - from the changes he has seen in his art practice since

he moved here and the way he approaches his work since he 'died.' In looking back, Perkins says he can understand how creating is important to him and says 'creating gives his life value.'

Perkins's paintings, sculptures and drawings have been well received in numerous group and solo exhibitions. His work is also in private collections in North America, Europe and Asia.

The gallery opens Dec. 9 at 7:30 p.m.

Submitted by Roy Mitchell