

Artists are 'Hooked' on tradition at Cultural Centre



By Brock Weir

You might have a few examples hanging around your house, pieces you made with a latch hook and a few pieces of yarn. They're rugs, sure, but have you ever truly appreciated them as art?

Clare Bolton, a curator at the Aurora Cultural Centre, guesses that answer is probably not. But, if she has her way, that is about to change with *Hooked on Tradition*, a new exhibition at the Centre curated by members of the Newmarket Rug Hooking Guild. *Hooked on Tradition*, a first exhibition for the Guild as a group, is on now, and runs through April 28, and is designed to give art lovers a fresh take on an age-old pastime.

'I want people to appreciate rug making as an art form because there is a mentality out there that you can get a kit and anyone can hook a rug, and it is quite minimized,' says Ms. Bolton. 'Traditionally, women's art forms have been minimized, so I want people to appreciate the art, understand that some people have actually created the pattern, done the shading with their yarn, these are people who take rug hooking up to a whole new level.'

Members of the Guild were at the Cultural Centre on Thursday morning, hard at work finding just the right places for each rug, art pieces which span over a century of creativity, ahead of the exhibition's launch on March 10.

Members of the Newmarket Rug Hooking Guild have been meeting since the 1960s and, over the years, a true sense of community has developed within the Guild, which is largely populated by women.

Bea Grant, for instance, has been a member of the Guild since 1969.

As a 25-year-old mother of three young girls, 'I just had to get out of the house!,' she says.

Her first introduction to rug hooking was at the Guild of All Arts on the Scarborough Bluffs and, after job posting with her family in St. Louis, where primitive art was all the rage, she brought the technique back to Canada.

'I started out trying to look realistic, but when I got to St. Louis, they were doing some really rough, ragged stuff,' says Ms. Grant. 'They really wanted authentic-looking rugs, so I switched my style. When I came back to Canada, I got a teaching certificate, specialized in Canadian primitive, but it is not everyone's cup of tea.'

Guild member Lois Hayes, on the other hand, first tried her hand at textiles 20 years ago, giving it up for a little while, and picking it back up again in earnest after retiring a couple of years ago.

'I love it because it is textiles, it is recycling material, and it is working with a circle of very supportive women,' says Lois. 'Even if we don't all have the same views in the end, once you start hearing about all the different techniques, styles and methods, you learn about your community and really your whole country.'

Bell pulls, on the other hand, were Marilyn's Bellamy's first introduction to rug making. Think those long bits of fabric dangling from the ceiling Maggie Smith used to pull in Downton Abbey to summon the servants.

'I saw the bell pulls in 1983 and I had no idea what they were, so I asked how you learned and where to go,' she recalls. 'From there

on in, I have done nothing but fine shading. I had two boys in the house and I had to get out and be with some ladies.?

You might be sensing a theme here, but Ms. Grant says rug hooking ? even in the Newmarket Rug Hooking Guild ? is an art form that has, so far, attracted kids as young as six and adults of all genders all the way up to? well, however long they can hold a hook. ?Just like quilting reached its zenith in popularity about 20 years ago and has become a truly acknowledged art form, rug hooking is on the verge of that right now, we think,? says Ms. Grant.

If you want to be on the vanguard of the rug renaissance, head over to the Aurora Cultural Centre for the exhibition. Guild members invite you to come out and experience traditional rug hooking for yourself on Wednesday, April 18, from 6 ? 7.30 p.m.

The exhibition's formal opening reception will take place at the Aurora Cultural Centre next Friday, March 23, from 6 ? 8 p.m.