

Clark McClure remembered by family and friends at new show



By Brock Weir

They came to celebrate a life well lived, and the spirit of who they were honouring was omnipresent at the opening of Bene Acta Vita ? a new exhibition and sale encompassing the life, work, and passion of eminent Ontario artist Dorothy Clark McClure.

The show, featuring works selected by her three children Kelly, Chris and Andrew, and curated by Andrew, now an art teacher at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, showcases her work as a budding teen artist, through her corporate life as an artist at a prominent Toronto ad agency, through to her passion for preserving Ontario's heritage through art and, finally, a late in life interest in following her heart ? and her fingers ? through interpretive art.

This is not the first time Ms. Clark McClure's work has been proudly featured on the walls of the Aurora Cultural Centre. The Church Street landmark, which Ms. Clark McClure immortalized many times, has the honour of having hosted Ms. Clark McClure's last exhibition before her death in 2012.

Then, as now, the exhibition was helmed in part by Stephanie Nicolo.

?That was my first official exhibition as a full-time member of the team here, and I am very proud and honoured to be part of this project here today,? she said. ?This is a show to celebrate her life, her art, and her creative spirit and I truly feel her spirit here today.?

At the opening, Ms. Clark McClure's life and work were recalled by Aurora historian John McIntyre, curator of the Sharon Temple National Historic Site, which also inspired her work. He shared his first memories of Dorothy when she arrived on the scene in 1968. It was around the time Doane Hall, a local historic home then situated on the northwest corner of Yonge and Wellington, was demolished to make way for a plaza.

?Dorothy always felt like she was just a few steps ahead of the bulldozer and often she was because I think people value their heritage buildings more [today] than they did back in 1968,? he said. ?Dorothy was making people aware of what they were losing.

?She became a very active member of the Aurora Historical Society. She didn't always agree with the things the Society did. She always had her own opinion and always maintained them. That was one of the wonderful things about Dorothy. She always knew we were all, in one way or another, working towards the same end.

?I think as we look around here this evening at her family, friends, and what is hanging on the walls around us, I think Dorothy is here tonight and we celebrate her work and her life.?

As curator of the show, it was Andrew's turn to speak on behalf of the family. He said at the time the last time he was supposed to make a speech in honour of their mother, he accidentally drove off the driveway into a snowbank and it was up to Kelly to do the honours.

He told people at the opening he was looking old friends, new friends, ?people who knew mom or are just getting to know mom, seeing her work for the first time.?

?We chose work from 60 years of being a professional artist and I ideally tried to show a cross section of the work she completed over the course of her life,? he said. ?One of the most remarkable things for Kelly, Chris and I as we went through the work and the things she left behind for us, is the quality and quantity of the things she accomplished over her life. It was a life that was committed to conservation, a life that was committed to history, and a love of art in all its forms.

?In the 1950s, she was a young, hip cat. After school she took a year off and travelled, something a young lady didn't necessarily do at the time,? he added of a life which took her to doing corporate world of the American Paper Box company to the halls of Liberty Magazine which specialized in teaching women ?how to put makeup on in high heels while serving the perfect meal for her husband.?

?This work is as far as California and Texas, out on the east coast, and wherever she went, she was to paint, document, and fall in love with the space she was in. Probably the most famous work is the sepia drawings of famous buildings, but that was part of having a life as a mum and needing to make a living as an artist. She didn't make a lot of money as an artist, but she had a career [and] the Red House Studio, which she was very proud of.

?Wherever jazz musicians and artists and writers are after they pass, she is there, probably laughing and smiling and happy that her work is up and being seen and shown. Because it is mom, I hope you buy some works ? she wants it on your walls!?

The show runs through Saturday in the Aurora Cultural Centre's Red & Blue Galleries.