

Being ?different? pays off at 55th Aurora Art Show



By Brock Weir

Despite an artistic life devoted to capturing the wonders of nature through his camera lens, now and then Aurora photographer Ralph Brunner decides to let loose.

The photographs of moose in the wild and majestic waterfalls would have to wait for another day. This time his subject was a little bit more mundane ? a sardine can, lid peeled back to reveal ?nothing.

?Every once in a while I get the urge to do something stupid,? he says of his photo, entitled ?Emptiness?.

?I didn't think it was going to go anywhere, but I was sure people were going to talk about it because it was different.?

Sometimes doing something stupid pays off and ?Emptiness? took home top honours in the photography category on Friday night at the opening of the 55th Annual Aurora Art Show and Sale presented by the Town of Aurora with SOYRA ? the Society of York Region Artists.

Over 300 paintings, photographs, sculpture and mixed media pieces filled Town Hall over the weekend as the venerable juried art show kicked into high gear and the milestone made it extra special for organizers, dignitaries and presenting artists alike.

?There aren't many shows that have been running for even 25, let alone 50 or, in this case, 55 years,? said Mayor Geoff Dawe at Friday night's opening reception. ?It is quite a milestone and we are proud to be associated with SOYRA and present the show. It is quite a milestone. One of the great things to see is the number of artists who come back year after year with new and exciting pieces. The partnership we have formed is strong and very rewarding and I want to thank everyone for their participation and congratulate everyone on another successful event. Your work is motivating and your pieces are really outstanding.?

The scope of 55 years was underscored by SOYRA President Linda Welch who asked the standing-room-only audience crowded into Council chambers to raise their hands if they were under the age of 55. A sea of arms went into the air.

?If there are any 12 year olds here ? and there are some 12-year-old entries in this show, 55 must seem like very far into the future,? said Ms. Welch, speaking to the youth artists in attendance. ?You probably can't even imagine what life would be like when you reach that age, but it is a very long time and, for the rest of us who are 55 or more, time has likely slipped past like the rushing streams are today. But you know that reaching 55 is very special. I expect that both groups, those under and those 55+ understand the significance of reaching a landmark number, whether it is age 13 if you're 12, or 18, or 55. Or a benchmark like graduation, or your first job, or your very first juried art show. These are benchmarks in life. Another thing to remember is you're participating in one of the longest continuously running art events in Canada.?

Driving home her point, Ms. Welch highlighted the Arts Project in Toronto, which has been running for just 10 years, and the Richmond Hill Studio Tour, which has been running for 16. She also referenced Art Moscow, Russia's longest-running art event for 21 years, the 35-year-old New York Art, Antiques and Jewellery Show, and the 47-year-old Maine Labour Day Art event ? all of which were cancelled this year.

?Over and over, one of the key reasons failed events did not continue was because they didn't have enough volunteers,? said Ms. Welch. ?Fortunately, volunteerism is alive and well for this event. 25 per cent of our volunteers are not SOYRA members. Some are

participating adult artists from out of the Region, some are youth participants from schools, and some are university graduates who are gaining work experience. It is volunteers like this who make an event run smoothly and make it fun.?