

Brothers find artistic inspiration in Canada's winter wonderland



By Brock Weir

Maybe you're breathing a sigh of relief that Mother Nature has been delayed in sending us a full blast of winter, but it's a different story for artist brothers Dave and Ross Rheaume.

The Rheaumes might have followed distinct career paths with their art, but they are united by more than blood; they are both inspired by the wonders of the wild Canadian winter. They are sharing their passion with the Aurora community through their new joint exhibition, *Snow Days*, on now through December 19 at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

'It all goes back to our upbringing,' says Dave. 'Ross grew up in the Northwest Territories and I grew up in Ottawa where my father was a Member of Parliament, so we spent a lot of time in the snow as children and there is something there that calls to both of us. When I think of being a child, I almost automatically think of snow. I spent so much time in the outdoors as a child that it is automatic for me. There was a lot of tobogganing and back then things were a lot freer. I would be out on a winter night with my buddies at the Bruce Pit in Ottawa, crossing the train tracks under a starry sky, and all of that plays into my feelings of childhood.'

'Maybe I am trying to get in touch with all that through the paintings, but when I think of childhood and snow, freedom comes to mind.'

For others, the word might be 'nostalgia' and, indeed, Dave says his work has drawn comparisons to Alex Colville and Norman Rockwell. He admits that through his art he tries to evoke feelings for a simpler way of life and a simpler time. In doing so, he often goes back to the source: old photo archives.

'I try to pull up photos not a lot of people have seen, try to revitalize it and bring it back to life,' he explains. 'I am also a lover of history, so the idea there is a historical thing going on is important to me and I think gives people an emotional charge. If someone can look at one of the paintings and go, 'Oh, my God! I know exactly what kind of night that is,' or, 'I know exactly what kind of spring morning that is,' that to me is something of a success.'

There is no doubt viewers of Dave's art will have those moments when they view 10 large-scale paintings that take up a great deal of the Aurora Cultural Centre's exhibition space, a series of art based around Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, which has been touring for the last three years.

A Christmas Carol, he says, is something that was bound to be in his 'wheelhouse' for both the winter and historic components that make up the whole.

It is his first attempt at a literary-based series, but it has struck a chord, with paintings from the set being sold to connoisseurs from as far away as Norway. He doesn't have any set ambitions at the moment for another literary undertaking but is contemplating setting his sights on a classic that is something completely different: Bram Stoker's Dracula.

?I don't know if we can turn the clock back or not,? he says on whether the quest for the simpler days of yore is actually an attainable goal. ?Every generation probably says it, but I think my kids have missed out on the experience of being a child. I grew up near some woods and all that, but they have their own reality they are defining, so I don't think it will ever be as simple as it was.?

In the meantime, he is looking forward to receiving feedback from art lovers over the next couple of weeks at the Aurora Cultural Centre. On hand for the official gallery launch last Saturday night, he returns to the Centre this coming Saturday as part of their Holiday Pop-Up Market and Victorian Christmas Afternoon.

?It is a very important part of the process to see what people respond to and then you know whether you are going in the right direction or not,? he says. ?I like to bring the works before the public because they will give you a much more honest read on where you are than your family and friends. Great as they are, they will always give you all the positives. It always surprises me what people react to. Just when I think I have got a handle on it, they will react to something else and I think that is critical for an artist.?