

Canada represented 'from coast to coast' in milestone art show



By Brock Weir

Inspired by the forests and rocky terrain of cottage country, 'Muskoka Dreams,' a bold painting by King artist Brigitte Granton dominates the equally bold red wall of the Aurora Cultural Centre, in a show celebrating two significant anniversaries.

Ms. Granton is one of over 60 artists whose works now fill the walls of the Aurora Cultural Centre in a new exhibition, on now through the end of January, celebrating both the 30th anniversary of the Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA) and the 150th anniversary of Canada itself.

For Ms. Granton, the ruggedness and the natural beauty of the north is symbolic of the quintessential Canadian experience.

'The raw beauty of our northern landscape never fails to inspire me,' said Ms. Granton on Saturday afternoon at the official launch of the exhibition, which featured live entertainment from the Aurora Winter Blues Festival and the Thursday Night Jam Band.

Mrs. Granton completed a cross-country tour of Canada last summer, picking up inspiration along the way and, in the end, Newfoundland was her favourite experience 'hands down.'

'I have been there three times and the people are incredible, for one thing,' she says. 'Then there is the moodiness of the landscape. Even though it is a rainy, cloudy, misty province, there is something about the atmosphere there that just creates such a dramatic backdrop for a painting. I love it!'

Aurora artist Claire d'Aurore was also inspired by Atlantic Canada which she too explored further this past summer on a 44 day, 10,000km road trip. Her photos of the lengthy journey are featured in the Great Hall gallery.

The diverse collection of paintings and photographs from the over 60 artists was curated by fellow SOYRA members Carol Tremayne and Josee Savaria, who picked up the gauntlet thrown down by SOYRA President Linda Welch to put together a show celebrating the two very important milestones 'and the artists themselves also took up the challenge to showcase their own Canada. 'It was very challenging because all the work is very different and of all different sizes,' says Ms. Savaria, who curates the art gallery at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

Adds Ms. Tremayne: 'As we knew there was going to be a Canadian component, initially we thought there would be one room that was just Canadian 'then we saw how many there were and it was just too many. We had to figure out how to disperse the work in different rooms.'

As visitors flooded the galleries on Saturday, Ms. Welch weighed in on the results.

'I think the show looks terrific; they brought a good eye and it shows well,' she said. 'People who come in are saying that it looks great and that makes me very happy. We have a following now, which is nice. I know people who have been following our shows for 10 years who came to see this show [earlier in the week] before it was crowded, but the buzz and excitement of this opening is really exciting'and it also helps make our new painters feel good about themselves being part of this bigger thing.'

If you missed the action this past Saturday, there's more to come this Saturday, January 21, as Town Crier John Webster sits for a

portrait with eight SOYRA artists in all his finery. The session gets underway at the Aurora Cultural Centre at 1 p.m. through 4 p.m. and all are welcome to watch the portraits take shape on canvas.