

Ontario artists celebrate significant milestone close to home



By Brock Weir

As the daughter of an artist and an artist herself, King-based photographer Claire Ross has grown up with the Ontario Society of Artists and, in turn, the Ontario Society of Artists has grown up with Canada.

This year, as Canada marks its 150th anniversary, the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) is marking its own milestone – 145 years – and it marking this special anniversary very close to home.

Mosaic: Ontario Society of Artists 145th Anniversary fills all four galleries of the Aurora Cultural Centre now through August 5. The OSA is Canada's oldest operating artists group and, as it looks ahead to the future, it is looking at ensuring it remains a valuable and relevant resource – and collective – for the changing face of Ontario art.

"145 years means we have a long, rich history that we can look back to and take direction and inspiration from, but we're looking to be a more innovative organization moving forward," says Ms. Ross, daughter of OSA member Judy Finch. "The mandate remains the same, committed to artists, our own members, and also artists in the community who are not our members trying to promote art in general.

"With technology today, we have an opportunity to reach more people and to be relevant to more people and also to provide a better service for our members. We're also trying to bring in a broader range of styles of artwork, techniques behind artwork, multimedia. Most of the works here are more traditional, but we're trying to move in a way that is going to bring in some newer styles." Fittingly, the theme of Mosaics is "Canada" which, in itself, has become a mosaic over the last 150 years.

"Canada is a country made up of people from all over the world, with a variety of cultures and perspectives and ideas," said Ms. Ross. "We want to be relevant in that we're flexible enough and inclusive enough that we can be relevant to a variety of different cultures, perspectives, and ideas. What we really want people to see is Canada isn't just one thing. It is a multitude of ideas and people and cultures and that is the thrust of the whole show."

It is a show which organizers hope reflects the reviews garnered when OSA's first put themselves out there to the public – way back when Canada was a youngster of five.

"This is the 145th anniversary show and the OSA was initially formed at a meeting in June of 1872," said OSA president Larry Glaser. "The first show was held in April 1873 and, at that show, there were 28 artists and here at this show we have 93. That show was really well visited and received and from the looks of the work here at the Aurora Cultural Centre I expect this one will also receive wonderful reviews and good attendance.

"This show was made possible by the Aurora Cultural Centre and we thank them for providing us with the opportunity to exhibit here and also with the hard work of some of our OSA volunteers that put in a lot of hours to make this show a success."

Added Cultural Centre curator Stephanie Nicolo: "I want to say how important it is to the Aurora Cultural Centre to be presenting artwork that is meaningful and professional that inspire others to continue to be their very best and consider new perspectives and new ideas. [The work here] celebrates different aspects and facets of Canada, different elements from little details [from artists'] personal lives and beyond into our landscapes. It is really important and we are very proud to be presenting all these perspectives."