

Pine Tree Potters Guild marks first with 'Earth to Fire' show



By Brock Weir

If run-of-the-mill cups and saucers are your thing, you might be in the wrong place when Aurora's Pine Tree Potters Guild takes over the Aurora Cultural Centre next week for their very first Fine Art Exhibition.

Entitled 'Earth to Fire', it brings together two galleries full of pieces from the Potters using their art and the clay from the earth to express themselves in ways they might not have done before.

That is not to say you won't find a cup or a saucer among the items on display, but if you do, run-of-the-mill certainly won't be an adjective you would use to describe them.

'We had to make a statement,' says guild member Cathy Harris of the overriding vision of Earth to Fire. 'It could have been anything from elephants chained up, to a house devastated by earthquakes or floods. It just wasn't supposed to be functional like a plate or a casserole. It had to be better. Each piece tells its own story. You can look at each piece and you might read an artists' statement and it will tie in, but each piece has its own story to tell.'

Artists at the Guild collectively submitted 65 pieces to be considered for the exhibition.

Under the watchful eye of juror Bruce Cochrane, a former professor of ceramics at Sheridan College, 45 were ultimately selected based not just on his own personal taste, but also function as well. As an example, Cochrane specializes in functional ceramics like plates and teapots and one piece was juried out of the show because the lid just missed the mark in fitting right.

Potter Sara Stevens has two pieces in the show, including the aforementioned elephant breaking free.

'The elephant is called 'Escape', she explains. 'I wanted to show how we treat animals, how devastatingly we used them to within an inch of their life. I am appalled, basically. It was just something that came at me. We were having a sculpture day and I didn't plan on going that route, but that is just what happened.'

Ms. Harris took a different, but not altogether un-zoological, tack to her pieces. One piece of hers viewers to the show will be able to see is a raku dragon fly incorporating coral from Cuba, and mounted on a piece of weathered driftwood as a wall hanging. Additional pieces are flat panels of butterflies with raised wings mounted and framed.

'I had the idea for a dragon fly for a long time, having done the body a while ago, but I scoured the beaches trying to find the perfect

wings for the dragon fly," says Ms. Harris. "I think it brought out the inner potter in a lot of people and they all wanted to do different stuff."

Adds Ms. Stevens: "Some were afraid to [do something different] but now they can."

The Cultural Centre's Meridian Gallery (formerly known as the Red Gallery) will be the starting point of the exhibition, featuring wall-mounted ceramics for everyone to see. Continuing through to the blue gallery will be other objects, large and small, mounted on walls, on plinths and in cases so everyone can get a 360 degree view of just what the Potters can do.

A centrepiece will be a "collaborative quilt" of square ceramics, each following a prescribed path of black and white glaze. Depending on how they use the glaze, there might be varying shades of blue and grey in each piece, but each will be up for sale. Looking at some of the pieces being prepared for exhibition last week, these squares range from your typical flat plaques to intricately sculpted mushrooms and toadstools on an equally square field.

As each piece is sold, the Potters ensure there are plenty of additional "patches" on hand to replenish the piece not only to keep it fully stocked, but fresh for people who just can't get enough.

"We have learned so much in this exhibition about each other," says Ms. Stevens. "Some people have never tried to do a sculptural piece, but now they have done one and they are just so excited about it. That is what we are about. We're a teaching group and it was just so amazing to see what people came out with. The talent is really big and they loved it!"

Earth to Fire runs at the Aurora Cultural Centre from July 5 through September 6. An opening reception will be held at the Centre on Thursday, July 10 from 7 - 9 p.m. For more information on the exhibition, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca or call 905-713-1818. For more information on the Pine Tree Potters Guild, visit pinetreepotters.ca.