



The Changing City at the changing art gallery

Dan McIvor's Martin Mars by Karen Lorena Parker.

Richmond Art Gallery's Jeremy Todd and exhibition committee had their hands full this week sorting through local artwork submitted for a new show that opens tonight.

Every year community artisans have a chance to show off their crafts at Richmond Art Gallery.

This year, they are showing off their art.

Two long-standing gallery exhibitions the Art Centre User Groups exhibition and Artists Among Us are getting a makeover to put the people behind the art on equal footing with professional artists exhibited the rest of the year.

Turning a patchwork community show into a conventional fine art gallery group show to fit in with the gallery's contemporary focus has much to do with Jeremy Todd, the gallery's 36-year-old interim director and curator.

Rather than issue an open call, the show will be curated and exhibiting artists will be limited to one work. It's a stark contrast from previous years, where there were no limits on artists, artwork and themes.

"We were really looking for a professionally curated and installed show, something that will consider how works relate to each other in the space and make it a really handsome-looking group show, a real professional show" said Todd.

"We hope, in doing that, it will reflect

really well on the artists that are selected."

Items are judged based on how well they stick to the theme of The Changing City. Whether through painting, sculpting or drawing, artists were encouraged to explore aspects of a rapidly developing city—rather than submitting the same work each year.

Artisans will still have a chance to sell their artwork later this month at Art Market Day—a bazaar-like experience in the adjacent lecture hall.

Also new this year is the Open Studio Event, a streamlined version of the Artists Among Us studio tour. This year's tour will feature fewer studios, all of which are used to create art, not just show it.

"We want to make sure that it's feasible to take in everything in one day, or even in an afternoon," says Todd.

Todd has been in the director/curator chair for a few months, replacing Corrine Corry, who is on extended leave. He is also an artist, writer and educator—having taught art courses at University of B.C. and Emily Carr. He has recently explored digital filmmaking, completing an 83-minute film about the 1960s French artist and political theorist Guy Debord.

Todd, originally from Toronto before moving to Vancouver 10 years ago to pursue a master's degree from UBC, had his first brush with Richmond Art Gallery five years ago when he wrote an essay based on an exhibition by Barry Jones,

who is now chair of the gallery's board.

Apart from managing the daily operations of the gallery, Todd is also working to expand the gallery's reach.

Improving relationships with emerging and professional artists, partnering with local community groups more frequently and expanding outreach programs are all on his list.

Another thing we are doing to try to bring people in is make the gallery more inviting and comfortable, sort of break down the modernist white cube intimidation factor.

The recent closure of the gallery's art rentals facility has freed up space for a lounge and media lab, allowing people a place to research art and attend free monthly film screenings.

Todd's basic philosophy when it comes to choosing art is challenging a diverse public and selecting pieces that link to popular culture and community issues. He also aims to break down assumptions and stereotypes about what contemporary is, or might be, and who it's for.

"There's a lot of ground to be gained in terms of people in general feeling they have access to contemporary art and that they can understand it and enjoy it."

By Matthew Hoekstra
Staff Reporter