

Artist reflects on COVID-19 pandemic



By Bill Kilpatrick

On Friday, Nov. 1 the Art Gallery of Bancroft held their opening reception for Toronto artist David Holden entitled *The Missing Years*. According to the art gallery's chair Molly Moldovan, Holden's art is "high realism" and he uses "recontextualized images to reflect his emotions and the feelings of loss and grief from the early covid years." The name of the exhibit was inspired by the John Prine song "Jesus: The Missing Years", and was sponsored by Pat Cooke in memory of Paul D. Cooke. As he began his speech, Holden joked that this exhibit was his "pandemic project," but as you walk through the exhibit it becomes clear that much of his art is laden with emotion as he presents, in the form of triptych story telling, some of the difficult feelings that he, and others, struggled with during the COVID-19 pandemic. Triptych art is a form of art where three separate paintings are paired together to tell a story. He said that much of his work was inspired by a trip that he took to New York a mere four days before the first lockdown occurred. When the lockdown struck, life for him did not initially change much as he worked from an office, so he now worked from home and continued to paint from home. However, since all the art stores were closed Holden ended up painting over other works of his that he found "unsuccessful." He used photographs that he took from his pre-pandemic trip as inspiration for his paintings, but soon found that they were not what he really wanted to produce. "I had become bored with them as individual paintings," said Holden, "I wasn't really relating to them," but as he began to pair them, he found that they created a narrative and often this inspired him to produce the third painting. As the pandemic wore on Holden had some big life changes, such as a friend passing from cancer and a long-term relationship that came to an end and he used these as inspiration for some of the triptychs. Holden walked around the gallery and explained how he contextualized his photos into his experience during the pandemic. The first triptych he spoke about was entitled "All The Days of Mourning" and brought together hockey, a Jeff Koons art sculpture, and a stairwell with flowers. The first painting depicted two New York Ranger hockey players hugging in celebration after a goal, the second was a painting of the Pink Panther embracing Jayne Mansfield in a loving fashion, and the third painting also contained a candle that had just been extinguished. Holden explained that "In the early days [of the pandemic] we were being told to not hug each other so that's why I have these two groupings of these hugs going on? but for me as the pandemic was going it [the hugs] almost became an act of comfort or mourning." Holden also spoke about how he tried to keep track of the days, that he found were quickly all blended together, by creating and then painting his own calendar with the days of the week on them. In one of the smallest, but powerful paintings, entitled simply *Hallway*, which depicts his eye hole for his door, Holden captures how many people's lives went from limitless possibilities to a state of "paranoia and anxiety" about simply going out their door. Their eye holes on their doors became their only connection to the outside world. This project was Holden's way to help him process what he experienced over the course of the pandemic, and as he pointed out, "It's taking people a long time to process it as well. I think a lot of people just pushed through and wanted to move on with their life." *The Missing Years* runs at the Art Gallery of Bancroft from Oct. 29 to Nov. 29.