

Bancroft Studio Tour displays local talent and beauty



Laura Culic working on a cold wax oil painting at Black Spruce Art Works studio in Maynooth.

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By Nate Smelle

Over the next two weekends art enthusiasts from far and wide will descend upon the Bancroft area to immerse themselves in the creative energy of the local arts scene. Every year for the past two and a half decades, local artists have been opening their studio spaces to the public and providing people with an opportunity to intimately engage with the individuals fueling the local creative economy.

The Bancroft Studio Tour will take place from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 16 and Sunday, Sept. 17, and Saturday, Sept. 23 and Sunday, Sept. 24. The line-up for 2017 showcases the work of 18 local artists at 14 destinations. This year there will be six painters participating in the tour: Laura Culic, an environmentally inspired painter working primarily in cold wax and oil; Carol Westcott, a contemporary landscape painter who captures the essence of her experiences in rural Ontario; Philo Smith, a landscape and still life artist who works primarily in oil; Nancy McKinnon, vibrant landscape and wildlife painter working in oils and acrylics; and Ketha Newman, a Hastings Highlands-based artist whose paintings and prints explore the area's pioneer history and the modern-day rural experience. Stained glass artist Margo Merritt's alcohol ink paintings will also be on display.

After participating in the tour for the first time last year, Culic came to appreciate how special the annual exhibition is to local artists and the entire community. She said one of the things that makes a studio tour so special, is that it gives art lovers a unique opportunity to get a close look into each of the artists' creative processes.

"It helps to make art more accessible to talk with the person who created it and ask questions," said Culic.

"Often the art buying experience can be a little bit intimidating for people when they go into a gallery. This is a different way for people to connect with the process and the artists. It's more friendly and less intimidating."

The tour also has four potters exhibiting their work this year - Nancy Wilson, Saidie MacDonald, Karen Gray and Amy Doole - each adding their own style and variety of clay creations to the tour. Her fifth year on the tour, Doole recognizes how valuable it is to the artists and the communities it promotes. By driving the back roads, while traveling from one studio to the next, Doole said the tour encourages visitors to really soak in the natural beauty of the Bancroft area. Autumn is a perfect time for people to tour the area and visit the places where local artists create their art, she said.

"We've had really good luck each of the years I've been on the tour with the colours peaking around the tour. We've had the cold, rainy days and the really spectacular sunny days which also has a nice aspect. Whether you are coming into a studio on a rainy day with a wood stove going or if you're driving around appreciating the fall colours they both have a nice aspect to them. Just being able to drive around and see the colours is amazing."

The dynamic nature of the art featured on the tour allows everyone a chance to find that special piece to add to their personal collection. For example, the wearable creations of clothing designer Jennifer Martin, jewelry designer Michelle Bruce and fibre artist Rosannah Penner and Susan DeCiantis give people an opportunity to add some one-of-a-kind flare to their wardrobe. Furniture maker David Ferguson's refined and rustic furniture, using live-edges, burls, colour and metals will again be a highlight of the tour; as will the work of wood artists René and Elaine Butikofer. Likewise, sculptor Wendy Taxis's whimsical and quirky wire sculptures, and glass artist Karen Istead's fused and stained-glass art provide more layers of beauty and creativity to the 2017 studio tour. In

celebration of its 25th anniversary, this year's tour will feature the creations of three young up and coming artists from the Bancroft area.

Doole will be sharing her space with Georgia Alphonzo, a young artist from Lake St. Peter who will be entering a special visual arts focused program for Grade 9 at a Peterborough high school this year. Michelle Bruce will be displaying her art alongside that of Mary Williams, a Grade 12 student also from Lake St. Peter who plans to pursue an art degree at university. Newman's studio will also feature the work of Sophia Wagland, a young artist currently studying at North Hastings High School.

"Everyone is really excited to give young artists a chance to show their work and talk to people about it," said Doole.

For more information on the 2017 Bancroft Studio Tour, including addresses and directions to each of the 14 participating studios visit www.bancroftstudiotour.org.