

Magical, mythical and mystical paintings at AGB

Allan O'Marra grew up in a one room school house with seven siblings and his parents on Maxwell Settlement Road, just north of Bancroft. The tiny school house, now O'Marra's studio is also his muse. Surrounded by beautiful surroundings, he grew up appreciating beauty and finds inspiration from the area's hills, lake, animals and buildings.

The exhibition will include Homestead Winter Evening, a painting of his old school house home that captures the magical, mystical and mythical nature of the area through O'Marra's realistic style that carries with it a touch of the surreal. Outside the school house looks bleak with a dark sky, patches of snow on the ground, leafless trees; the outside is in high contrast to the warmth of the light coming out of the windows.

O'Marra approaches the canvas in two ways:

Sometimes the theme/concept drives the choice of images to paint; and sometimes one painting will be the starter image for a series. The latter was the case in the theming of this exhibition, with the appearance of one specific painting, driving the theme Magical-Mystical-Mythical and defining the overall sensibilities of the images I chose to paint and/or chose to add to the show.

While Homestead Winter Evening is part of the exhibition, it was not the painting that inspired the work that people will see in the gallery. That inspiration came from the painting, Baloo's World. Baloo, an Akita dog that belonged to a neighbour, lies with his back to the viewer, looking across the fields to its owner's home beyond a hedge of trees. Above the dog is a moon that O'Marra styled on the recent super moon he had photographed. The magical, mystical, mythical feeling of that specific painting is what prompted me to proceed with the series.

When asked if Baloo's World was making any reference to Andrew Wyeth's painting Christina's World, O'Marra was surprised. There are similarities. In Wyeth's painting a young woman in the foreground is looking over the fields at a homestead, her back to the viewer. O'Marra says he didn't base the painting on Wyeth's painting, let alone think about it. Baloo's World grew out of the combination of two photographs. O'Marra is as much a photographer as he is a painter.

O'Marra brings great skill to his canvases having been painting for four and a half decades. And while the paintings are realistic, O'Marra points out that there is always something mystical, magical, mythical, something surreal about the work. O'Marra hopes people see that although it's high realism, it's not just like a photograph.

One of his strengths is figure and portrait painting which takes up a major part of his art practice. The exhibition, however, will feature a variety of subjects: landscapes, animals, figures in landscapes as well as portraits.

When asked what he hopes people take away with them after seeing the exhibition, O'Marra says, I hope they are mesmerized by the pieces and take away a real sense of joy and contact. I hope my work starts a thinking process that takes them somewhere else pretty quickly.

The Art Gallery of Bancroft is thrilled to be shining a spotlight on the work of local artist O'Marra by presenting *Magical-Mystical-Mythical*. Refreshments and light snacks will be served at the opening on March 3 starting at 7:30 p.m. The AGB encourages you to visit the exhibition throughout its four weeks in the gallery. The opening and the exhibition are free to the public. The workshop, Portrait Painting with Acrylics facilitated by Allan O'Marra, runs on March 12 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please contact the gallery at 613-332-1542 to reserve a place.

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