

Remembering artist Gerald Humen



Local artist David McIntosh, left, with Tanya Mahar, niece of artist Gerald Humen, at the opening of 'Remembering Gerald Humen' at the Art Gallery of Bancroft. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

'I almost thought I was in a European salon,' said Barbara Allport, president of the Art Gallery of Bancroft (AGB). 'This music has changed everything!' Beautiful classical music was being performed by North Hastings musicians CT Rowe and Cate Meder, as people mingled and admired the work of the late Canadian artist Gerald Humen during the opening of 'Remembering Gerald Humen' at the gallery on March 2.

'This is the second time we have had a showing of his work,' said Allport, 'the last time, he was here himself.' Humen is a noted Canadian artist, described by Allport as 'a Canadian treasure.'

He was born in the Ukraine in 1935, and immigrated to Canada in 1946 where he eventually attended the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. After spending much of his life in Toronto, he came to Bancroft in 2005 as a resident of Hastings Centennial Manor where he continued to create art until his death last year.

'He was a man of very few words,' said Tanya Mahar, Humen's niece. 'In fact, he never titled any of this work. He had his drafting table in his room, and there was paint spattered everywhere. He really appreciated that people would pop in and visit him there.' Mahar noted that all of the work on display during the current show at AGB was created during his time in Bancroft. 'He was a double amputee, and people will remember him outside the front door of the Manor, even at -30, sitting in his wheelchair with his hat on, having a smoke,' she said.

'Whatever happened in the physical, the art was always there,' agreed local artist David McIntosh, who assisted Mahar in organizing and arranging the mounting of the current showing of her uncle's work. 'We wanted to make a celebration of Gerald's life and work. With the special music, we have food, we have port - in short, we're having a party,' he said. 'Gerald loved parties; he would definitely approve.'

Although never having the good fortune to meet Humen, McIntosh knew right away that this body of work was fascinating and enlightening to explore. Much of Humen's work is black and white, ink or paint on canvas.

'After graduating, Humen was part of the spirit of the '60s in Toronto,' said McIntosh. 'Old rules were laid aside in the name of energizing and enriching the place of visual art in society. He was an explorer by nature; his subject changed with his passion for his natural surroundings. He saw beauty and wonder in all living things: trees, flowers, rocks, the human form, water, clouds in the sky - he worked with them all. His work, whether landscape, skies, or the nude human form, has a meticulous tenderness about it, a loving pursuit of the essence of what he was seeing.'

'Everyone enjoyed his work,' said Mahar. 'In his day, he would often give away his art. He believed that art belonged to the people.'

Gerald's wish was that everyone could afford a piece of art.?

The sponsor of "Remembering Gerald Humen" is Ashlie's Bookstore in Bancroft. "They have been a longtime supporter of the art gallery," noted Allport.

Humen's work is widely distributed in museums and galleries across Canada. The current showing of his later work completed in Bancroft will continue until March 26, and is a wonderful opportunity to purchase one of his paintings. For further information, contact the Art Gallery of Bancroft 613-332-1542.