

Uncomfortable showing at Art Gallery of Bancroft



Nate Smelle with his painting 'Ghost of the Great Awk' during the opening of Consensual Discomfort at the Art Gallery of Bancroft on Nov 6. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

'My style is very aggressive,' said David Maris at the opening of Consensual Discomfort at the Art Gallery of Bancroft (AGB) on Nov. 6 featuring the work of local artists Maris and Nate Smelle.

'My work is not for the tender, or the faint of heart.'

Both artists shared exhibits of their works inspired by concerns for world social justice and environmental sustainability and the result was a very uncomfortable evening.

'Art isn't always just fluffy and fun,' noted AGB president Barbara Allport, introducing the show and the artists. 'It can be about human consciousness and our humanity. This show is a statement about our human condition.'

'We have to act vociferously on the things that matter,' said Maris, whose work included artistic comment spanning the complex and deep rooted racism issue, to the bombing and drone strikes in Syria, Yemen, Pakistan and other countries resulting in the deaths of innocent children.

Maris minced no words when it came to the 582 Canadian cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, which comprised two pieces in the show: 'Cindy' and 'Court of Queens Bench Justice Robert Graesser' addressing the case of Cindy Gladue.

Gladue was a 36-year-old aboriginal Cree woman found dead in an Edmonton motel room bathtub in 2011.

During the subsequent murder trial, her family and other spectators were subjected to graphic details of her death that went beyond what was ever permitted in court before. Bradley Barton, the accused, was acquitted.

In April 2015 Canadian Press reported that the Crown has filed an appeal in this case.

'I like to highlight these issues,' said Maris. 'They should not fade away' and we need a public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada.'

Following the discomfort of Maris's presentation, Smelle spoke about his work in general, and the work on display for the show.

'Often I start painting something beautiful .. and then something happens where I get a kick in the ass,' he said. 'Ghost of the Great Awk' is a piece that took over five years to complete, started out that way.

'Shortly after I began, the news reported the death of 112 workers at a garment factory in Bangladesh where people worked in unsafe conditions for little money.' Large clothing retailers in North America sold clothing products the dead workers had been making. I painted flames, and ghostly faces came out of the flames,' he said.

Setting the painting aside for a while, Smelle became interested in the demise of the Great Awk, a flightless north Atlantic water

bird, now extinct.

?They were shot, and clubbed to death for food and oil, or often just wasted,? said Smelle. ?I got thinking about the very last one ? what was it that compelled that person to do that??

Smelle took out his painting again. ?The gowns of the garment workers became the bird. What do these things say about us ? profits are more valuable than life??

Consensual Discomfort will be showing at AGB until Nov. 28.

Pat Cooke sponsored this presentation, in memory of her late husband Paul David Cooke.