

ARTSCENE

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Current art display reveals human portraiture

By Craig MacBride
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Historical and contemporary portraiture faced off at the Oakville Galleries recently as two distinct collections of work were compared.

Arlene Gehmacher, President of Forster's National Portrait Gallery at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), and Oakville Galleries' registrar and exhibitions co-ordinator Shannon Anderson each presented slide shows of collected work.

The slides and accompanying discussion complemented the show currently running at the Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square, *Revealing the Subject*.

The show was assembled from the permanent collection, with Anderson as curator, and its eclecticism pushes the boundaries of what is traditionally understood as portraiture.

Norman Cohn's video *Peter in Long Term Care*, one in a series of films of children in hospitals, shows Peter, who has a respiratory disease, lying in his steel crib and being cared for by a nurse.

Micah Lexier's *Seven Siblings* is made up of seven books standing together on a shelf. On the spine of each book is a photograph of one of the siblings, standing back against doorframe, being measured. Marking a doorframe is the most common way that siblings are measured against one another, but the stories within those books are truly what make their lives what they are.

In *Revealing the Subject*, these works fit nicely together, but when presented in a slideshow with the ROM's portrait collection, the pieces



Peter C. McCusker • Oakville Beaver

Oakville Galleries' registrar and exhibitions coordinator Shannon Anderson explains the art show at Centennial Square, *Revealing the Subject*, pushes the boundaries of portraiture. The show continues until June 8.

seem to overstep the boundaries.

The ROM clings to the traditional idea of portraits as paintings of important people wearing their important medals and sashes and looking at the world without amusement.

The Oakville Galleries, on the other hand, has looser restrictions, hanging on their walls virtually anything that has a person, noteworthy or not, as the subject, provided the piece is interesting art.

The divide is a fascinating one, and it illustrates the distinctive mandates of two institutions heading in different directions.

Gehmacher said that the ROM, above all else, is concerned with historical accuracy and authenticity. As well, there needs to be a reason for the portrait to be in a museum; the subject has to be significant.

Among the portraits that make up Forster's National Portrait Gallery — a collection that has never been displayed in full and remains in storage — are paintings of Canadian poets Pauline Johnson and Archibald Lampman, as well as inventor of the telephone, Alexander Graham Bell.

What the National Gallery is attempting is to collect portraits of notable Canadians, but as the collection gathers dust and a procession of people pass through the position of president over it, the aim has sometimes been overlooked.

"The people (Forster) wanted represented were based on merit, not the accident of birth," as was the case of a baron whose portrait was added to the collection by a past president,

Gehmacher said.

Collecting portraits based on merit, though, doesn't manage to represent Canada well either because countries are not made up of only the successful and scholastic.

The Oakville Galleries has a good handle on that concept, showing portraits of a family of Russian immigrants gathered around a dinner table, appearing uncomfortable in front of the camera, and a couple on a blanket relaxing on a grassy hill.

These photographs, along with pieces like *Peter in Long Term Care*, do a better job examining the human condition. And, like portraiture itself, the context within which the human condition is experienced constantly changes.

Anderson said that is one of the reasons that permanent collections need to be brought out of storage and juxtaposed with art by other artists working with similar themes.

"There are different narratives yet to be told," Anderson said.

"The connections will change over the years."

It is that attitude of re-evaluating their acquisitions that keeps the Oakville Galleries a strong, contemporary institution.

Hopefully, it will continue adding to its permanent collection in the same manner.

Revealing the Subject is on display until June 8 at Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square.

Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square is located at 120 Navy St., 905-844-4402.

Dive into the season with Boat, Sport and Leisure Show



Liesla Kortmann • Oakville Beaver

The Bronte In-water Boat, Sport and Leisure Show has something for everyone. Event organizer Peter Whitaker, left, and Bronte Outer Harbour Marina's Harbour Master George Bielefeld, are encouraging all residents to head to the lakeshore this weekend. The two are standing aboard Bielefeld's Trojan Tricabin.

All systems are a go for the first and only spring boat show in the GTA.

The Bronte In-water Boat, Sport and Leisure Show, has, as its name suggests, something for everyone May 30 - June 1.

The venue is the Bronte Outer Harbour Marina, a place organizer Peter Whitaker describes as the "nicest of all on Lake Ontario."

"I'm thrilled to have the show here, it's so well maintained and understandably deserves its nickname as the 'jewel on the lake,'" said Whitaker.

For marine enthusiasts there'll be 70 new and used, power and sail boats in the water to view, representing major manufacturers from around the world.

And for those less inclined, a 15,000 square foot, ice-rink sized tent will house more than 80 exhibitors who'll fulfill the sport and leisure component of the show.

This area will feature backyard and cottage life products and services such as

hot tubs, barbecues, golf clubs, electronics, pool tables and games.

The spring show has been three years in the making for Whitaker who is an avid fan of boating. In fact, he has been living in a 40-ft. cabin cruiser for the past four years. It is currently docked in Port Credit.

Due to the gap between this spring show and the previous one held annually in Toronto every January, Whitaker said boaters are eager to attend, especially now that the season has launched. He expects about 25,000 people will converge for the weekend show.

The Bronte Outer Harbour Marina is located at 2340 Ontario St., in the Village of Bronte. The show runs from noon until 9 p.m. May 30 and 31, and 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. June 1. Admission for adults is \$4 and seniors and children are free.

For more information log on to bronteboatshow.com or call 905 891-5925.

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