

Artists feel 'insulted' after losing use of Gallery walls

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But local artist Laura Kingsbury doesn't feel there has been any miscommunication.

"We were told we would not have the use of the Gallery at all," she said.

When artists met recently with Town staff at the library Kingsbury said they were told "the Gallery was no longer for our use" and taken on a tour of the newly-renovated facility to look at alternative spaces where local art could be displayed.

"There was precious little. I felt demeaned and marginalized," said Kingsbury in a letter to the mayor and councillors.

"We were referring to the Gallery walls," said Halton Hills Cultural Centre supervisor Jamie Smith, referring to what was stated to the artists.

The Town's Director of Recreation and Parks Terry Alyman said last week there will be a permanent collection (Helson's) on the Gallery walls but Town staff are looking at movable display units to be used in the gallery where local art could hang.

Smith said they have been keeping their discussions "fairly loose in terms of what we're going to do" waiting for a curator to come on board.

That curator is expected to be in place in March and will manage exhibited artwork in the Cultural Centre, said Bonnette in a letter to the artists' community Jan. 21.

"Please be assured that Council is aware of the concern for local art display space and has directed staff to continue working with the user groups to find a solution that is mutually acceptable. The possibility of access to the Helson Gallery will be more fully explored and your continued involvement is encouraged," wrote the mayor.

Kingsbury feels council may be backtracking "a little bit" on its original decision regarding the Gallery because of the pressure being applied by some of the artists.



Local artists (from left) Inge Kremer, Jan Zimmerman, Susan Little and Laura Kingsbury are not happy with the options they have been given to hang artwork in the Gallery of the Cultural Centre. Photo by Ted Brown

Alyman said the exciting part of the new library "is how much more space we have available for the display of public artwork."

"There will be increased opportunity and exposure for not only local artists, but artists of additional mediums," said Alyman.

Kingsbury isn't thrilled with the use of movable displays by local artists in the Gallery.

"It still does not give appropriate hanging space for some of these bigger exhibitions," said Kingsbury. "It kind of marginalizes us. It's almost an insult."

"If it came down to that's all we could have, that would be the best scenario as opposed to being out in the lobby," she added.

Artist Inge Kremer is also not pleased with that option.

"If they can help it, we will not go into the Gallery period," said Kremer. "There's no transparency there."

"We're very disappointed. They're not letting us onto the walls. We should be on the walls. This is what a gallery is," said Kremer.

Jan Zimmerman, another local artist, also wants to continue exhibiting on the gallery's walls.

"I just don't see how that can work, hanging (paintings) things on wheels," she said.

The artists support a suggestion by Kingsbury to share the gallery—giving artists the use of it for 12 or so weeks a year so exhibits like John Sommer's Juried Show, the Artists Among Us Show, the Palette and Pencil annual exhibit and the Camera Club's yearly exhibit could be held there.

In a letter to the this newspaper, Kremer says, "many of us have been asking why the decision to accept the Helson donation has been made without first consulting the local art community and why there was and still is such a lack of transparency surrounding this situation."

"Surely we should have been consulted before being cancelled out of our space at the new library," said Kremer.

"We couldn't consult until we knew we had an agreement signed," said Bonnette.

He said the Helson collection will be a "magnet" for out of town visitors. "It's a good thing, it's a positive. It will be a boon to the downtown Georgetown business area."

Bonnette said they have listened to the artists.

"We're going to be working with them. Nobody's going to be shut out of the Gallery."

Bonnette said there will be some changes to how the Gallery operates, however.

"We're going into something new so there's bound to be adjustments. What those adjustments are we don't know," said Bonnette. "There will be opportunities (for local artists) in the Gallery and other parts of the library as well."

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