

# 40th Annual First Nations Art Exhibit opens

By Chezney Martin

On Friday, May 15 at 7 p.m., the Woodland Cultural Centre will be celebrating the 40th year of the Annual First Nations Art Exhibition with Elizabeth "Betts" Doxtator as this year's featured artist. The exhibit opening will have Chief Ava Hill and M.P. Phil McColeman as dignitary speakers.

The First Nations Art Exhibit runs until July 11, and offers the opportunity for Indigenous artists to sell and showcase three pieces of their own unique art.

Woodland Cultural Centre's Artistic Director Naomi Johnson said, "There's definitely more art this year," with work spanning from the Yukon and British Columbia.

"I'm really happy with this year's work. It's exactly what First Nations Art should be. It's a mix of materials: we have photographs, we've got paintings, drawings, corn husk, sculpture. It's a little bit of everything and like I said, it's artists of all ages and



An art piece titled "Massacre," by Janice Toulouse, an example of what is to be shown at the exhibit this year. PHOTO OF ART BY CHEZNEY MARTIN

experiences," said Johnson.

She explained that showcasing art in the exhibit is an opportunity for aspiring artists to be featured alongside estab-

lished artists. "We have returning artists who have started at this place, who have gone on to have their own solo shows and gone on to other galleries. They

still come back to this exhibition."

The Woodland Cultural Centre opened as an indigenous museum and art gallery upon the closure of

the Mohawk Institute Residential School in October of 1972. Its main focus was to collect and maintain Indigenous artifacts and research to build a museum. Today it offers a rich heritage space, telling the story of the Woodland peoples – including a library and archives, and tours on indigenous culture and the residential school system to visitors. It is home to over 5,900 square feet of gallery space full of Indigenous art and over 35,000 artifacts in the museum.

The featured artist for the First Nations Art exhibition this year, Elizabeth Doxtator said that she welcomes everybody to her Everything Cornhusk gallery in the Ohsweken Plaza. Several of her pieces will be sent to the centre, while her "Encircles Everything" piece was returned to her gallery on Tuesday of last week.

"I tried to study the Great Law to have a good understanding of it. I wanted to depict what I was learning, and that this seemed like the most logical way to do it," said

Doxtator. "When I was studying it, I was really trying to visualize what it would have looked like and so, this is how it came out," she explained.

Her piece shows the plight of the Peacemaker finalizing the Great Law and Haudenosaunee Confederacy, with over 50 doll fixtures surrounding a cornhusk tree. Many of her other pieces showcase Haudenosaunee history, while her paintings depict what she calls "reversed colonialism."

For Community Awareness Week Doxtator was invited to show pieces of her work at Six Nations Polytechnic, and is willing to provide self-guided tours of her gallery to explain the background behind her available pieces.

Along with the exhibit opening, Doxtator was invited to showcase in Planet Indigenous, an upcoming event at the Woodland Cultural Centre on July 31. The opening of the event will feature Don Burnstick and Buffy Sainte-Marie, and tickets are on sale at the Sanderson Centre.