

Crayons bring depth to artist's creations

Goodwood artist Helen McKenna thrives on diversity and challenge.

Her exhibition at Markham Theatre provides a fascinating overview of her current works, which range in scope from beautiful landscapes to thought-provoking social commentary. McKenna has recently begun to use crayons, with fascinating results. "I took a workshop in August and that got me really interested," she explained. "I used to do sculptures, which I loved, and (crayoning) reminds me of that."

She builds up layers of colour with the crayons, then

sculpts them with a knife to create light and texture. Her exhibition includes a haunting portrait of a woman standing by a window, warmly bundled up against the cold and holding a candle. The ice storms in eastern Ontario and Quebec provided the inspiration for the portrait.

Contrasting this sombre mood is a charming study of an old woman, whose ageless beauty and joie de vivre is offset by the flowers around her. The face, which inspired the portrait, is of a lady celebrating her 105th birthday in a nursing home," said McKenna, who keeps

pictures of interesting subjects on file.

Issues such as world peace and the fragility of the environment are among the themes she addresses and her interpretations, while often dark, contain elements of hope. One painting shows a bombed-out building with a field in the background dotted with poppies. In the foreground, amongst the rubble, a single chair stands triumphantly intact, a blaze of flowers growing beneath it. "As always, her landscapes and flowers provide a joyous affirmation of nature and remind the winter-weary that spring is on the way. In this exhibition, McKenna has captured the splendid glory of fall, in a

series of breathtaking acrylics.

The series was inspired by an essay written by a 19-year-old woman, which contained the observation: "All the colours of the world come together in the fall." "I painted them after reading this, it inspired me so much," said McKenna.

She is a member of the Lemonville Group of Artists and is currently teaching art at Seneca College in Uxbridge. Those interested in viewing her current exhibition can drop into the Markham Theatre auditorium during box office hours from 11 a.m. daily until Feb. 28.

-Kate Gilderdale



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Helen McKenna will exhibit her work at Markham Theatre until Saturday.

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