

Finding meaning in chaos

With a show as diverse as the 43rd annual Mann Art Gallery Winter Festival Show and Sale set to start, it's about making room to discover the conversations artists have with their works.

By **Peter Lozinski** - February 5, 2019



Michael Peterson, the guest curator of the 2019 Mann Art Gallery Winter Festival Show & Sale, poses with some of this year's art show. (Peter Lozinski/Daily Herald)

The Mann Art Gallery is putting the finishing touches on this year's Winter Festival Show and Sale.

The 43rd annual show, which invites members to submit pieces they have completed in the past week, is being curated by guest curator Michael Peterson of Saskatoon last week.

The works have begun to be hung, the winners have been chosen and the gallery walls are once again art.

Those walls, though, will be a little less crowded this year. Last year, over 200 works were submitted, but this year only allows one entry per artist, a little over 100 works will adorn the gallery walls. The change gives the works the space and attention they deserve, as opposed to the floor-to-ceiling wall-to-wall display of last year.

"We're very happy with the response," said acting director and curator Lana Wilson.

"It's been wonderful, and the vast majority of the artists have been supportive of the decision to limit the number of works. We understand it's about our ability to create the best possible show."

It's important to remember, Wilson said, that this show is about allowing people to present their work in a professional gallery space.

"We do have strict hanging requirements for safety and professional presentation," she said.

"Allowing the works to be able to be appreciated without being crowded, being lit properly, that's the goal. We want the best show that we can."

While the number of pieces in the show has fallen by more than half, it's still a lot of works to curate.

"It's amazing that you're getting (over 100) artists contributing. That's great," said Peterson, the curator.

"It's still a lot of pieces to put together."

Peterson was tasked with arranging the works, examining the pieces and choosing the show winners.

"My approach was to just sort of start. That's usually my approach to any type of creative project."

"You make mistakes, move things around, see what works and then move them around again."

As Peterson examined the show, certain themes began to emerge. Peterson noticed landscapes, portraits, and abstract pieces. He saw pieces focused on depicting animals, and pieces using religious iconography.

"I think it's useful to put those together. Part of (my role) is to try to draw meaning out of this chaos. There are a lot of things that are there," he said.

One of the interesting conversations he found surrounded how Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists approach their work.

"One of the things that was interesting to me is the contrast between traditional landscape, which is a landscape that seeks to remove the presence of people within it, and some of the pieces that have been done by Indigenous artists that seek to bring people back into the landscape."

people back into the land," he said.

"It's important to recognize how these traditions become traditions. Because a landscape on its that same narrative of forgetting that people are here is what allows settlers to move in and oc land is unoccupied.

"I don't know whether those were conscious choices or unconscious choices, but a number of th are putting humans back in that land, and seem to be speaking back against that narrative. I d was their intention, but I think that's an interesting discussion to have about this show."

Once Peterson arranged the works in a way he thought made sense, it was time to jury the sho selections go beyond straight depiction.

"It's artists that are using references from real life in their work, that are then changing it and a voice," he said.

"It's just that step of making the compositional choices, the material, the way pieces are preser the big challenge in artworks and really represents growth for the artists. Representation is a g tend to connect the most with ar works that are wanting to express or communicate something

Peterson will be back in Prince Albert Friday and Saturday to open the show. Following Friday's talk as he and others walk through the exhibition. Peterson is excited to meet the artists and he

"The reality is this artwork is part of a conversation with the art world itself. It's based on relati don't know the people, I have relied on a lot of the others here to say if this is (a piece) workin

But to be able to get to see them and ask them questions, I understand the walkthrough to be it's nice to hear from the artists what their intentions are, and then to talk about how the work

For many of those artists, this will be one of the first times they have entered their work into a venue to showcase their point of view.

"So many things about this exhibition are designed to provide an entry point,"

Wilson said.

"We have such a strong educational mandate. It 's a lot of vulnerability to be putting your art c entry into that opportunity. But now they do have a chance to put their work on display and the with gallery staff or with the curator.'We hope that we are creating the kind of environment whe the community. That is part of the mandate here.'"

The opening reception for the annual Winter Festival Art Show and Sale is set for Friday at 7 p.m.

members and free for participating artists. The curatorial talk is scheduled for Saturday at 10 a

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<https://paherald.sk.ca/author-peterlozinski/>

Peter Lozinski is the editor of the Prince Albert Daily Herald. You can reach him at 306-764-4 peter.lozinski@paherald.sk.ca or on Twitter @Peter_Lozinski. His latest posts can be found h

