

EMMC

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John Mlacak makes an indelible mark on local artistic community

By David Johnston

Artistic expression is thriving in Ottawa, thanks to events such as the 2010 Ottawa Art Expo, Oct. 29-31 at the St. Elias Centre in Ottawa.

The show and sale aimed to “enhance the value that the public attaches to the arts, recognize the best amongst the fine arts community at an awards gala and celebrate Ottawa and Canada’s cultural heritage as seen through the eyes of its artists,” said host Natalie Kahale.

Only in its second year, the expo featured a wide variety of popular artists, among them well-known local community builder John Mlacak. He was awarded the “Lucille Broadbent Artistic Achievement Award” by the Board of Ottawa Art Expo. The presentation was made on opening night by Mayor-Elect Jim Watson.

Like most of the accomplishments that have filled John Mlacak’s life, he took the honour in stride. The award recognizes the recipient’s commitment to art and to community, something John Mlacak has made his life’s ambition.

He only picked up a brush after retiring from a 35-year career that included helping to build Kanata as Reeve of March Township and designing technological advances for Bell-Northern Research. For 11 years



Ottawa Mayor-elect Jim Watson presented John Mlacak with the Lucille Broadbent Artistic Achievement Award at a reception and gala opening night of the 2010 Ottawa Art Expo at the St. Elias Centre Oct. 29.

he was active in local and regional municipal politics in Ottawa. He served a three-year term as a Commissioner on the National Capital Commission and was a member of the Visual Identity Advisory Committee of the Ottawa Transition Board during 2000 when it recommended some of the civic symbols for the new amalgamated City of Ottawa.

“I guess you could say I have always been designing one thing or another,” he said with the gracious ease that defines his personality.

“Art is just another form of design.

You start with an empty canvass and take it from there. For me, there are no rules.”

His passion is to paint in oils, usually outdoor scenes. He has created about 1,570 paintings in his little workshop in the basement of his Kanata home. He and wife Beth have lived in Kanata since 1965, raising their three children in the community he helped to shape.

Always an active individual, John says he found the time to paint after suffering a heart attack about 30 years ago.

“They gave me a little more time,” he said, which he used to take a few art lessons. And he found his natural ability with design transferred nicely to a visual medium.

“There is no right or wrong in art. You decide what you like and that’s all there is to it.”

After retiring from his ‘day job’, John began to devote more and more of his leisure time to his new found passion.

“I found that I could paint all day and not get tired, so that’s what I did. I guess it became my job.”

He credits his wife Beth for providing him the support to be creative while “she looks after all the business.”

He enjoys a steady demand for his work. His paintings are exhibited in

local, Ontario and Québec galleries and he is represented in private and corporate collections in Canada, the United States, Europe, South America, Australia, Korea, Indonesia and Japan. John is an elected member of the Society of Canadian Artists (SCA) as of May, 2009 and was elected to the Ontario Society of Artists in 2006.

John had oils accepted into the SCA's 40th National Open Juried Exhibition at the Tudor Gallery in Montreal in August, 2007, the 41st at the Papermill Gallery in Toronto in May, 2009 and the "Roots" exhibition at the Saint John New Brunswick Arts Centre in June, 2009. Six of John's oils were exhibited at the Karas Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia in December, 2007 in a show entitled "Tracing Our Heritage". Two other artists of Croatian heritage were also in the show. John exhibited three of his large oil landscapes in a group show in April 2008 at the Croatian Embassy in Ottawa.

He is a founding member of the Kanata Artists Studio Tour and the Kanata Civic Art Gallery.

"I'm glad people like my paintings, but really, I do it anyway because it's what I like to do," he surmised while crowds of onlookers studied his works on display at the expo.

John's paintings are alive with colour and expression. From bold and subtle colours in landscapes to the vibrant red and green roofs of Québec farm buildings and towns, he is fascinated by the play of light and shade weaving through trees and over the white torrent of rapids and waterfalls.

He admits that his influences include the renowned Group of Seven artists.

"I like the impressionists. I believe art should exaggerate real life. My paintings are generally representational with a high degree of personal expression. At times, they may be somewhat impressionistic. With a strong emphasis on design, form, and colour, I use

natural shapes, dramatic light and shadow, cool and warm colours that may be intense or subdued, and strong modelling to achieve depth and effect."

John often paints from a photo he's taken of a street scene or landscape, but sooner or later he discards the photo and lets the painting take on a life of its own.

"The painting tells me what I have to do," he says. "My goal is to capture a sense of place, and I am influenced greatly by the emotion that can be inspired by nature's beauty and power."

John creates large oil canvases of stone terraces, flower-filled gardens, porches and impressionistic scenes of yesteryear. He also returns frequently to the grandeur of the Canadian landscape, as well as New England and Europe.

"I'm inspired to paint by nature's beauty and ever-changing face. It may be a dramatically lit landscape-sometimes given scale and interest by farm houses and barns, seasonal characteristics and colours, or intriguing patterns that evoke intense feelings of awe and a desire to capture the moment on canvas. I know I have been successful when the finished painting rekindles my initial feelings. The pleasure of that initial contact with something special in nature is capped when those viewing the painting are attracted by what inspired me to create it. To achieve that emotional connection within the limits of a two-dimensional canvas, I strive to maintain interest by encouraging viewers to wander through the scene, linger, and experience the recreated moment."