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Portrait exhibit showcases artist's talent, honours notable Kamloops citizens



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Mairi Budreau doesn't scare easily.

You realize this after looking at the walls of her Barnhartvale house.

At the top of the stairs leading to the living room hangs a larger-than-life oil painting of former Daily News editor and Kamloops ex-mayor Mel Rothenburger, his right hand pointed at the viewer as if he is gripping an imaginary pistol.

Around the corner, two equally massive oil paintings — one of B.C. Lt. Gov. Judy Guichon at home on her ranch, the other of a magnificently dignified-looking Tk'emlups Chief Shane Gottfriedson in his ceremonial regalia.

Downstairs, in her studio: hockey icon Mark Recchi, First Nations pioneer politician Len Marchand and Polish mother Zofia Cisowski.

"I was looking for a project that would give me experience," said Budreau.

Talk about experience. Budreau cold-called 14 of the most-notable people connected to Kamloops and convinced them to allow her to paint large-scale oil portraits that would eventually be put on display in an art exhibit.

"I didn't even know if any of these people would say yes," said Budreau, "because, prior to phoning them, I knew none of them. So, here's this little voice over the phone, 'Can I paint your portrait?'"

Being new to Kamloops probably worked in her favour. (Budreau moved here in 2005 from Maple Ridge to attend Thompson Rivers University's fine arts program.) She didn't know who any of her prominent subjects were prior to choosing them.

This meant there was none of the typical idolatry or reverence that might have intimidated an artist more familiar with the 13 personalities.

Still, it took gumption as an emerging artist to tackle such an immense project. Budreau not only had to paint their likeness, she had to capture the essence of who they were.

No easy feat, considering she spent only an average of one hour interviewing her subjects before snapping a photograph from which she would paint their portrait.

"It's a pretty short window of time to get a sense of what someone's like," said Budreau.

The artist did a remarkable job. The portraits are stunningly accurate and, particularly in the portrait of Zofia Cisowski (whose son Robert Dziekanski died after being Tasered at Vancouver Airport in 2007) the portraits evoke the emotions and history of the subject.

Budreau's paintings go on display at Kamloops Arts Council's main gallery in the Old Courthouse Cultural Centre on Saturday, Oct. 5, with an opening reception from 6 to 8 p.m.

The exhibit runs until Oct. 26 and will also be featured in a six-page spread in Arabella Magazine.

It's expected that most of the subjects Budreau painted will purchase the images after the show, but Budreau said that was never an obligation. She simply wanted to paint portraits that honoured people she considered to be "building blocks" of the community.

"It was a fun experience," said Budreau.

"It was. It was enjoyable."



CATHERINE LITT/THE DAILY NEWS

ARTIST Mairi Budreau stands with two of her oil paintings that are in the Walks of Life exhibit, opening on Oct. 5 at Kamloops Arts Council's main gallery in the Old Courthouse Cultural Centre. Budreau chose 13 notable Kamloops-area people and, with their blessing, painted their portraits. Among them, Lt. Gov. Judy Guichon, at left, and Tk'emlups Chief Shane Gottfriedson.



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