

Mentorship teaches business side of art

Seven Niagara artists selected for discovery exhibit

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Port Colborne artist Diana Williamson stands beside her painting 'Mick', which is on display until Dec. 2 at the Bell Tower Community Arts and Entertainment Complex on Central Avenue as part of the Gaber & Bell Tower Artist Mentorship Program. - Mike Zettel/Metroland Photo

FORT ERIE — It's not always easy selling yourself.

Artists may know exactly what they want when it comes to expressing themselves on canvas, but as for selling their work or making sure the right people in the art world know of them, many are at a loss.

An exhibit now on display at the Bell Tower Community Arts and Entertainment Complex hopes to be the first step in changing that.

The works are from seven artists across the region who have been selected by a jury of international art critics as having the potential of thriving in the global arts scene.

The installation on display until Dec. 2 is part of a partnership with renowned artist Antoine Gaber. The Gaber & Bell Tower Artist Mentorship Program is bi-annual event that seeks to identify exceptionally talented artists, with the eye toward mentoring them, teaching them the ins and outs of selling, establishing pricing, promotion and even effective social media strategies.

Speaking with Niagara this Week at Sunday's opening, Gaber said there is no program quite like this in Canada, and there is definitely a need for it.

"Most artists are not business savvy," he said. "Artists want to be discovered, they want to be helped to make that happen."

Port Colborne's Diana Williamson, one of the seven artists in the program, said she saw the call for submissions online and jumped at the chance to work with Gaber. "It's an honour to learn from him," she said. "It gave me confidence.

"It's nice not to have your artwork just sitting on a shelf and get out there."

Gaber said the topics the program deals with, which also includes copyright issues, branding and designing a business, are crucial if an artist wants to have a sustainable career, especially on an international level.

"If you want to go international, you need to know how to do this," he said.

Other artists who are part of the fall program include Astrid Akkerman (St. Catharines), Jack Ashwood (Ridgeway), Michelle Boyd (St. Catharines), Inge Danyluk (Fort Erie), Margo Jamgochian (Fort Erie) and Brian Kon (Niagara Falls).

Gaber, who moved to Niagara Falls three years ago, is also organizing a show at the Niagara Falls History Museum. Running May 12-Sept. 9, Water for Life will feature dozens of artists from 18 countries and will focus on the theme of fresh water accessibility.