

OUR HERITAGE

The varied landscape of local art



ROBERT AMOS

On Art
robamos@times.ca

The Bank of Montreal Financial Group's 15th annual BMO 1st Art! competition honours visual arts excellence in post-secondary institutions from coast to coast. National winner of the BMO 1st Art! competition is Xiao Xue, and B.C.'s regional winner is James Fermo, both recent graduates of the University of Victoria.

The national and regional winners were selected from 303 entries submitted from across the country. The national winner will receive a \$15,000 award, and the 12 regional winners from across Canada will each be awarded \$7,500. All 13 winning pieces will be on show from Nov. 16 to Dec. 16 at the Justina M. Barnack Gallery at the University of Toronto.

Xiao won for her large-scale piece, *Something to Ponder On* — a 1960s full-size Slumber Queen camper, which typically fits on the back of a truck. This camper gets around on its own, with six robotic legs powered by a one-horsepower motor. The sculpture was featured in this column on May 11.

Xiao says that the walking camper was inspired by her "urge to find solutions to the negative impacts of unnecessary waste." The camper will not be walking to Toronto, but the project's presentation will include a large digital photograph with design plans and a wooden maquette of the walking device.

Fermo graduated in June with a bachelor of fine art degree, and during his last year at UVic he specialized in constructing images digitally. What will be displayed in the BMO exhibition is a colour photograph, but in fact his work, titled *The Collection No. 3*, is an 18-minute video showing a pile of bodies, a sort of mass grave.

Fermo told me that his video art project features an image he created as part of his participation in the videogame *Dishonored 2*. He explained that the game is an "assassination vengeance game." On a computer, he gathered together a heap of "non-playable



Above: James Fermo: *The Collection No. 3*, computer generated image
 Below left: Brian Grison: *Self-portrait*
 Below right: Joe Coffey: *Teagan II*



characters" from the game, "virtual dead people," as he says, and he spent some hours piling them up in a "somewhat arbitrary" fashion. In his video, a bat-like figure flits over the carnage and they simply twitch a bit.

When I spoke to Fermo, it was the day after the recent events in Las Vegas, and I asked him if he had become desensitized to murders by years of playing video games. He replied that he didn't



believe that was the case. If confronted by a real murder, he said that he would be "shocked and appalled," but that he is "not as disturbed" by what he virtually experiences in the course of playing the games.

Fermo's full video is viewable online at www.uvic.ca/artsandculture/15th-bmo-1st-art/

The City of Victoria's first artist in residence is Luke Ramsey. This painter has been at work

for most of a year and I made a point of visiting what he has done on the walkway that leads down to the beach at the foot of Cook Street. I was mightily impressed.

Public art is hard to get right, and Ramsey has really added something creative and engaging to the sidewalks and stairs there. As it unfolds, his imaginative design relates beautifully to the beach scene and the shapes of the concrete. It even honours the

scruffy paint and graffiti that was there when he arrived. I vote that the city ask Ramsey to stay on for another term.

The Kingston Prize is an semi-annual, privately funded art prize encouraging Canadian portraiture. This year, 435 entries were sent from all parts of Canada, hoping to win the \$20,000 grand prize or one of two honourable mention awards of \$2,000 each.

Two Victoria artists are among the final 30 contenders. These are Brian Grison (briangrison.com) for his *Self-Portrait*, and Joe Coffey (jcoffeyfineart.com) for *Teagan II*.

The exhibition of all 30 finalists will also be shown in galleries in Gananova, Ont., and at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto during the next six months. Prizes will be awarded during the opening at the Peel Art Gallery in Brampton, Ont., on Nov. 4.

The Chapel of the New Jerusalem, an upper room at Christ Church Cathedral is, until Oct. 14, the scene of an exhibition and sale of two-dimensional art. This fundraising event draws on the resources of the congregation, who brought forth almost 300 art pieces that had been languishing in attics and basements.

A number of attractive items emerged into the light of day, including a pastel by Joe Plaskett, a circular screen print by Susan Point and two serigraphs by Ted Harrison. Ken Faulk's oil of a Prairie elevator is offered next to two very attractive watercolours of Christ Church Cathedral by Edward Goodall (circa 1940).

Of course, the public will likely spend most of their time browsing through almost 300 items, loosely categorized and stacked in bins. In addition to paintings by unknown artists and prints by the famous, thrifty art lovers will find frames of more value than what is currently in them.

The Cathedral's Chapel of the New Jerusalem itself is well worth a visit. A spectacular modern stained glass wall by Christopher Wallace graces the entire east end of the cathedral and is perhaps the finest single work of art in Victoria.

The sale continues daily and culminates in a live auction of some of the more attractive contributions. It's all on view until Oct. 14 at Christ Church Cathedral, Quadra Street at Rockland Avenue.

For more information, contact 604-683-0714 or visit www.churchnewjerusalem.ca