

# The Sunday Herald

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INDEPENDENT SINCE 1824

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA



**Surplus lighthouses / D8**

## Mi'kmaq art at city hall

Collector puts  
his money  
where the  
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**Smith-Dacey in final / C1**



## Art 'lifts people's spirits'

Mi'kmaq artists bring wealth of colour to Halifax city hall

### AT THE GALLERIES



**ELISSA BARNARD**

**H**ALIFAX CITY HALL is home to hotly coloured, graphic paintings full of symbols by Mi'kmaq artists in the Friends United Art Exhibit.

The exhibit, now open to the public, features paintings purchased by Aulds Cove businessman Rolf Bouman, who has put his pocketbook behind his passion for First Nations art.

"When I came from Germany 25 years ago I saw native art, culture and heritage were under-exposed. We couldn't find it," says Bouman, founder and president of Canadian Pioneer Estates Ltd., Canec Land Developments Inc. and (Ad)venture Canada Publishing Inc.

Bouman made it his mission to find it and has produced and funded the Friends United book of paintings in full colour by Mi'kmaq artists, including David J. Brooks, Darren Julian and Lorne Julien, all in the exhibit.

"I used to do five paintings a year before I met Rolf. Now I do five in a month," says Wagmatcook artist Darren Julian, who grew up in Afton, Antigonish County.

He started painting as a teenager and was inspired by his artist father, James Julian. "I was just always drawing since I was (a) little kid," he says, during an exhibit preview. "The style of my dad is the style of my stuff."

One of his paintings is inspired by his experiences at sun dances in South Dakota, which fascinate him. Small black figures have their arms raised, their sage bracelets and crowns visible. In the centre of the row of dancers is a sun dance tree.

Julian likes to paint trees and a tree is central in an environmental image of tipis to the left of a tree and city buildings to the right. Beside the city the tree is blighted. "In order to build up you have to kill nature."

He also exhibits an amazing freehand picture in black on brown of faces: two wolves, two bears, an eagle, a fish, a horse and a tree. "That took me eight days to do that. I just started with the bear here and I went down. I have no idea what I'm painting when I start," says Julian, who describes himself as being "very patient."



love to be doing this for a living," he says.

Lorne Julien of Millbrook, who signs his paintings Warrior on a Hill, which is his Mi'kmaq name, has been painting for 20 years and his style includes organic interior shapes within birds and moose, four colours representing black, Asian, his paintings Warrior on a Hill, which is his Mi'kmaq name, has been painting for 20 years and his style includes organic interior shapes within birds and moose, four colours representing black, Asian, white and First Nations peoples and a cross because he is a Christian.

"I do a lot of birds and eagles. For a person to be given an eagle feather is considered an honourable thing and they mention the eagle in the Bible 150 times." His paintings include a vibrant image of

Fish is by established Mi'kmaq artist David J. Brooks, whose daughter, Chelsea Brooks, also exhibits.



# Mi'kmaq

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two blue birds against a teal background. "I use a lot of bright colours in my work and I believe it lifts people's spirits."

Different colours have different meanings for him. The teal is "like a green and it represents life," says Julien. "There is a green cross in some of my work. (Jesus) isn't on a crucifix, he's alive and well."

Julien, who was inspired by Norval Morrisseau, participated in 10 exhibits last year. "This year I might be doing a show in Toronto and two locations in New York. Eventually we plan to do some shows in Germany and Europe."

David J. Brooks started painting over 40 years ago but he didn't have any paints when he was growing up in Indian Brook. "There wasn't much as far as the art world goes but my parents were both gifted. My mother was gifted at making flowers; she'd make birch bark flowers. She's got flowers in the Smithsonian Institution."

"My father was gifted at making stuff — carving. Both were artists in their own way but there was no label to identify them as artists."

He didn't take art seriously until he was in Toronto in the early 1980s and met New Brunswick artist Phillip Young, who had studied at Vesper George School of Art and at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, both of Boston, and exhibited in Canada and the U.S.

In Toronto, Young watched Brooks do a little painting of a girl sitting down and burning sweet grass in a bowl with elders' faces in the smoke. "Phillip liked the painting and said, 'Where'd you go to art classes?'"

He bought Brooks's painting and showed him how to stretch canvases "and all that other stuff," says Brooks.

"I started to meet other native artists in Toronto and we started to paint. There was one big melting pot of native artists and each one had something to contribute."

"The style I chose was Ojibwa because it's Eastern Woodland. That's what influences me, Woodland and Haida. I'm not a Haida but I do know what they taught me."

Brooks's concept is not always Woodland. "It's what I see," he says, pointing to a painting in fuchsia, purple, yellow and turquoise of a hawk with a fish in its talons. "We were fishing first and this bird came and stole our fish!"

The bright colours represent the energy he puts into his work. "There's a part of me in these and that's reflecting back."

The artwork he's doing now is totally different and inspired by accidentally dropping a tin of paint that exploded. Paint dripped down a nearby canvas and Brooks liked the effect.

"Now I make my own implements. I hit the top of the canvas and it runs down in all the different colours. It looks like grass, it looks like fire. It's fragmented."

His traditional paintings "pay the bills and I'm thankful for that. I have to feed my family but as I get older — I'm 61 — my style is evolving into something else. I'll see where it goes."

He's grateful to Bouman for buying his work. "That gave me money to travel to Halifax to buy canvas and paints. It gives me more of a chance to expand," he says.

His daughter, Chelsea, is also an artist. "I let her go wild with the paints since she was a kid. She won second place in a juried art show in Halifax. She beat out me!"

The Friends United Artists Circle also includes Norman and Fancy PeterPaul from Big Cove, N.B., Sandra Simon of Afton, and Raven Davis from Manitoba.

Bauman, working with former premier Rodney MacDonald and artist Raven Davis as he seeks to promote First Nations art, printed 3,000 copies of Friends United.

"We're giving them away to build bridges between Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and between First Nations people and other Canadians. I don't care what language you speak, you look at the book and you understand what the paintings are about."

"I still see way too much prejudice and stereotypes."

(ebarnard@herald.ca)



**Sundance** by Darren Julian, who lives in Wagmatcook with his wife, artist Amanda Julian, is included in the Friends United Art Exhibit at Halifax city hall.





My Future Partner by Lorne A. Julien, whose Mi'kmaq name is Warrior on the Hill, is on view in the Friends United Art Exhibit at Halifax city hall to April 16. The exhibit is curated by businessman and First Nations art promoter Rolf Bouman.