

8 Manitobans elected to academy of artists

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by Morley Walker



For the visual arts world, it's a big as the Hockey Hall of Fame, and it's making its first trip to Winnipeg in a decade.

The annual general assembly of the Royal Canadian Academy of Artists (RCA) is being held here June 21-24, bringing with it close to 100 of the country's top visual artists in 20 disciplines.

"Winnipeg has been a leader, as has Manitoba, in advocating for its own culture for decades" said RCA president Ron Shuebrook, a painter and former president of the Ontario College of Art and Design. "Your community has made an important contribution to the RCA and the arts."

Entry into the 127 year old RCA is by election by one's artistic peers. Of the 750 members, 33 are Manitobans, including architect Etienne Gaboury, animator Richard Condie, and filmmaker Guy Maddin.

But of the 20 new members being inducted at this year's congress, 8 are Manitobans: ceramics artists Karen Dahl and Grace Nickel, sculptor James Doran, filmmaker Noam Gonick, architect Neil Minuk, digital artist Reva Stone, painter Ewa Tarsia and glass sculptor lone Thorkelsson.

Two more originally hail from Winnipeg: Missouri-based ceramics artist Robert Harrison and Chicago-based photographer Laura Letinsky.

“Getting elected is like you’ve arrived” said Winnipeg glass artist Warren Carther, who corralled all the Manitobans to submit to the rigorous nomination process.

“They put themselves on the line because they could get turned down.”

Besides being a forum for artists to discuss their professional and political interests, the congress will stage nine events open to the public.

Among them will be an exhibition of the new Manitoba members’ work at the Exchange District gallery Mayberry Fine Art and a lecture by the famous British art critic Martin Gayford, author of the recent book *The Yellow House: Van Gogh, Gauguin and Nine Turbulent Weeks in Arles*.

Gayford will also participate in a panel discussion on visual art and the media, along with Vancouver writer and artist Douglas Coupland, who is among the non-Manitobans elected to the RCA this year.

“It’s important to note this is not a prize” said RCA past president Alison Hymas, a Toronto interior designer. “Member’s are elected in mid-career with a large body of work behind them.”

Upon its formation in 1880, the RCA was modeled on England’s prestigious Royal Academy. But unlike that organization, which still limits membership to painters, sculptors, and architects, the RCA has broadened itself to include newer art forms.

The entire RCA roster, of those living and dead, is 1350, including painter Lawren Harris and William Kureluk, architect Douglas Cardinal and filmmakers Atom Egoyan and Norman Jewison.

At the Winnipeg congress, four high-profile arts community supporters will receive the RCA Medal for their overall contribution.

They are patron Kathleen Richardson, administrator and writer Pat Bovey, writer and broadcaster Robert Enright, and writer and editor Meeka Walsh.

“Their members have made significant contribution”, said Shaun Mayberry, whose gallery boasts eight RCA members in its stable. “I wouldn’t be surprised if they had secret handshakes or head butts.”