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NEWS LOCAL

Five great arts events, including a tribute to the late Greg Curnoe, explore influences, outcomes.



By Joe Belanger, The London Free Press
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Three Pieces, by the late, great London artist Greg Curnoe is part of a show opening Friday at Michael Gibson Gallery, featuring rare 1961-65 studio paintings, collages and assemblages. Opening reception is Saturday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. The exhibition is one of five major arts events in London this year. (Special to QMI Agency)

Buckle those seat-belts, arts lovers, because 2014 is about to take off.

There are five major arts events in London this year to keep an eye on, beginning with a tribute to London's Greg Curnoe, who died in 1992 when struck by a pick-up truck while riding with a group of cycling friends.

Michael Gibson Gallery is hosting Greg Curnoe 1961-65 described as a "rare collection of studio paintings, collages and assemblages."

The show opens Friday with an opening reception Saturday from 8 p.m. until 10 p.m.

"These four years were pivotal to Greg's development as an artist," explained Gibson.

“He has his first solo exhibition, becomes close friends with Jack Chambers; meets his future Toronto art dealer Av Isaacs; meets Murray Favro; moves to his King St. studio; meets and marries Sheila Curnoe; (and) forms the Nihilist Spasm Band.”

Gibson said the show is aimed at showing Curnoe not as a London artist, but “a hugely important Canadian artist.

“Works exhibited in our exhibition include the first painting of Sheila — Sheila’s Legs, an early painted construction from 1964; For Eliz, Hugh, Murray and Marsden, one of the paintings included in Curnoe’s first Isaacs Gallery exhibition; and a major freestanding painting Three Pieces which depict three versions of a nude female figure.

“We will also be re-creating the feeling of his vibrant studio experience by including ephemera, early collages and early constructed assemblages,” said Gibson.

Curnoe’s King St. studio (in a long demolished building) was a gathering place for artists, musicians, poets, academics and others.

“He was a man who shared culture and showed people how they could think differently, but in a gentle way. I think of London without him. It would have made a massive difference.”

There’s no mistaking Curnoe’s impact on the arts scene in London and beyond, including the founding of Region magazine in 1961, the Region Gallery in 1962, and co-founding the Nihilist Spasm Band in 1965.

Later, Curnoe co-founded the artist-run Forest City Gallery in 1973, the Canadian Artists’ Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens with Jack Chambers in 1968, the voice of the country’s professional artists.

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The four other major arts events to watch for this year include:

Storms and Bright Skies: Three Centuries of Dutch Landscapes: Organized by the National Gallery of Canada and hosted by Western University’s McIntosh Gallery features works by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (four of his famous etchings), Jan van Goyen and Jacob van Ruisdael, covering the early 17th Century through to the 19th Century. An opening reception is planned for 8 p.m. Feb. 13 with special guests Richard Dirk ter Vrugt of the Netherlands Council. Joanne Vanderheyden, mayor of Strathroy-Caradoc and a Western board member.

Fired Up: A major exhibition of ceramic art to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the British Columbia ceramic artists’ group, Fired Up, at Jonathon Bancroft-Snell Gallery opening Aug. 7. The exhibition will feature works of current and past members of Fired Up, many of whom are expected to attend and give talks. Works by six emerging B.C. ceramic artists also will be featured to support the theme of past, present and future. “It is the oldest and most prestigious groups of ceramic artists in Canada,” said Bancroft-Snell. “As iconic in clay circles as The Group of Seven and Painters Eleven are in painting circles.”

Creative Age Festival: This is the first festival of its kind in London planned for May 22-25 and modelled after the original Edmonton festival, described as a “celebration of creative aging that encourages seniors to become more involved in arts programs — drama, music, visual arts, literary arts, and dance — celebrates and recognizes the artistic contributions of seniors in all areas of the arts, and raises public awareness of the benefits to health and well-being for older adults acquired through engagement in creative activities.” Details are still being worked out, but eight venues have been secured to date. Organizers are looking for volunteers and fleshing out the events, but have a number of community partners in place, including Museum London, London Public Library and others. See creativeagelondon.ca

Mantis Festival: The first arts and ecological festival held at Boler Mountain last year was deemed a success, inspiring organizers to try deliver another in August, although the date is not yet nailed down. The festival — designed for the whole family — features artists working in a variety of media, artisan and craft vendors alongside environmentally-friendly organizations and small businesses. The day-long event includes hands-on activities, do-it-yourself workshops such as building your own solar oven or making a worm composter and setting up a butterfly garden. The children’s area will feature recycled and nature-inspired art activities and visits from organizations that protect wildlife. There also will be music performed by local musicians and played by DJs. E-mail mantis.festival@gmail.com

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