

# Artists discuss residency

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This time last year the National Gallery launched its first artist-in-residency programme and exhibition, *A Day in the Life*.

Featuring artists Aston Ebanks, Cecilia Urdaneta and Randy Chollette, the 10-day residency resulted in three unique exhibits which were opened to the public shortly after completion of the residency term.

Hot on the heels of that success story, the Gallery officially opened its *Day in the Life II* exhibition last week, after artists Nickola McCoy-Snell, David Bridgeman and Kaitlyn Elphinstone spent the last two weeks creating their works of art inside the Gallery in its second ever residency programme.

For the three featured artists, this was the first time any of them

had taken part in a residency programme, and the adjustment wasn't without its problems.

"Having people look at my work and make comments on unfinished works took a bit of getting used to. It was also disconcerting explaining what I was thinking as I was working," admitted Mrs. McCoy-Snell.

Mr. Bridgeman agreed. "It is difficult to work under conditions such as these because there are constant interruptions," he added.

These reactions are to be expected as many artists, if not most, prefer for their work to remain private until it is finished, and seeing works in progress can be misleading for viewers. However, there are benefits to both viewers – who get to witness the artistic process firsthand – and the artists in the residency programme, which is one of the reasons why the Gallery

chose to run the programme.

"It was really neat to see people's reactions and to hear different opinions throughout the two weeks," said Ms Elphinstone. "It was particularly rewarding to watch individuals react on their return when the final art pieces were completed and installed."

"Most people seemed to enjoy seeing the work in progress and expressed an interest in seeing the work on completion," said Mr. Bridgeman.

As for working in a gallery setting as opposed to each of the artists' individual workshops, that also provided its own challenges and opportunities.

"My usual working environment is a lot different from working in the National Gallery space," said Mrs. McCoy-Snell. "For one, it [my studio] is in the garage and much smaller, and I also get a lot less foot traffic. I felt a bit more pressured to work but I also had a lot of ongoing inspiration based on art questions and people's interpretations of what they were seeing as I worked."

"I think it's safe to say that we all felt pressured to complete a body of work within the two-week timeframe but we all worked really well and managed to complete final pieces, which we were excited to present to the public," said Ms Elphinstone.

For Mr. Bridgeman, the larger space that the Gallery offered gave him the chance to create something different.

"I feel that the bigger the space I am given, the bigger the artwork. It was an opportunity to create some-



A mother shows her son the fish in the *Contained Fish* installation, part of Kaitlyn Elphinstone's *Experimental Landscapes* exhibition at the National Gallery's *Day in the Life II* exhibit opening last Thursday night. Photos: Anna Wootton

ate in my own studio," he said.

Ms Elphinstone also had a valid point about the helpfulness of working in the space in which artwork will be eventually exhibited.

"It was really nice to actually make the work in the exhibition space," she said. "It made me more conscious of image placement and how people use and interact in the space I was given."

Each artist's final body of work

colleagues'. Mrs. McCoy-Snell returned to the "basics of art," she explained.

"My primary focus in my room was paying tribute to the basics in fine art creating," she said. "I wanted to show the beauty of colour, texture and repetition in shapes. I also wanted to show that simple use of basic creative techniques can make bold and beautiful statements."

Mrs. McCoy-Snell's works were





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primarily abstract canvases, deconstructed and destroyed wooden chairs, also painted, and a dove installation that created the focal point in the centre of the room.

Mr. Bridgeman's exhibit was curtained off from the rest of the Gallery. Viewers stepped through the black curtains into a room filled with an abstract installation that Mr. Bridgeman intended to create and evoke a mood or emotion rather than provide a representative picture. This exhibit matches his painting style, he said.

"I feel as though the installation is really an extension of my painting: large shapes, strong lines, lots of different textures ... I wanted to seal my room off from the others to create an enclosed area that would emulate the feeling of being in a woodland, surrounded by the darkness of the trees. The light and activity from the other rooms would have been a distraction."

Ms Elphinstone's Experimental Landscapes exhibition focused on the relationship between humans and the natural world, a theme that she often explores in her artwork, through various media.

"I wanted to present the viewer with exciting fast-paced images which would hopefully encourage thought and discussion," explained Ms Elphinstone.

A notable item in her exhibit was the installation titled Contained Fish, five jars - each containing a fish - filled with water that hung from the ceiling on chains.

"The idea was based on our desire to domesticate animals and keep them contained," said Ms Elphinstone. "I wanted to present the viewer with a neutral description but an image which would raise thoughts such as tension, reason, strength, delicacy and so on. I enjoyed taking courses in installation art at school but really

ing to capture a memory," he said. "The reality is that, despite the apparent clarity of the memory, we are only left with a sentiment or strong emotion. The landscape piece features a red birch woodland and merges with an English Bluebell forest."

Mrs. McCoy-Snell, a previous winner of the Cayman National Cultural Foundation's Artistic Achievement Award and the McCoy Prize, explained the ideas behind her exhibit.

"In my room most of the paintings and even the dove installation give you the feeling of structure and order," she said. "I wanted to show how the use of a seemingly mundane object can become an artistic statement when used to create a focal point. It is my Art, Interrupted moment."

Despite time constraints, having three artists in the residency programme provided a sense of comradeship throughout the programme.

"There was quite a bit of interaction at the beginning, especially when we were doing our radio and TV slots," said Mr. Bridgeman. "But as we got started on our work we were very involved in what we were doing. There was very little time to interact in the studio."

Ms Elphinstone pointed out that having two artists working alongside her was certainly useful "when it came to problem solving."

Mrs. McCoy-Snell explained that the artists did converse daily for encouragement and support. "I would say, though, that it was very much three solo shows," she added.

When asked why she believed the Gallery chose to feature three artists rather than just one, Mrs. McCoy-Snell offered her opinion.

"I believe it was because the Gallery wanted to create a unique perspective and experience that could only be achieved by the use of three very differ-

Turner, aged 15, and Geoffrey Palorie, also 15, who was in Cayman on vacation from France visiting his family.

Ms Elphinstone pointed out that students' interest in the exhibit was one of the rewarding aspects of the show, as an artist.

"It was great to have the community there to see the work involved, to support us and to watch how three very different artists reached their final products," said Ms Elphinstone.

"It was particularly neat to watch students, interested in the arts, see the daily undertakings in the life of an artist."



From left, artists Kaitlyn Elphinstone, Nickola McCoy-Snell and Gallery Director Natalie Coleman with event sponsor E Head of Banking, Mike McWatt. Photo: Submitted