

NEW EXHIBIT

Artists reflecting current culture

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for the Leader-Post

Art has a long history of meshing with social commentary. Astute artists seek ways to trigger in their audiences an immediate response to a social issue.

The connection between art and social statement certainly has a prominent place in the history of art, seen in such pervading images as Andy Warhol's studies of commercialization to Diego Rivera's murals, which drew attention to the struggles of the working class.

Regina's talented group of artists is no exception to this practice, as is demonstrated by *Resisting Arrest: Seeking Sustainability*, an exhibition mounted by the Dunlop Art Gallery, on display until Sept. 4 at the Sherwood Village branch.

"I always think of artists as frogs," says co-curator Felipe Diaz. "Frogs feel the changes within their ecosystem immediately. They're the barometers. Artists work in the same way; they are the barometers of culture."

"Artists reflect what is happening in the cultural milieu," he adds. "That, to me, is an artist's job in society."

As a gallery whose mandate is to exhibit contemporary art, and one that shares space with the Regina Public Library — a core centre of learning and discussion — the Dunlop is a perfect fit for this type of art and discourse. In fact, pushing viewers' buttons seems almost a required component to the gallery's existence in this community.

The intent of *Resisting Arrest* is expression and exploration, not producing eye-pleasing work merely for its own sake.

"In my role as a curator and my role as an artist, I'm not that interested in work that just passively sits there," says Diaz. "I'm much more interested in work that really demands that the viewer become directly involved. I think that is the place for modern contemporary art."

Walking through the exhibition, viewers come face to face with an eclectic and contemporary style of art show. The space is filled with works in a variety of media ranging from ceramic sculpture to video projection. This addresses the issue of sustainability, a relatively new subject in environmental discourse, which deals with balancing social, ecological and economic needs.

A walk among these works is like a walk through a gaggle of street protesters, each with his or her own take on the matter. It's a look at sustainability from many independent perspectives.

The works have one thing in common: in its own individual way, each piece asks viewers to become directly involved. Only the very determined visitor will be able to dodge the nagging thought that this discourse is intended to prompt a personal reaction.

The exhibition brings together seven artists, four from Regina and two from Yorkton, joined by visiting artist John Dummet of Spaxton, England. Thoughts from Regina residents on community sustainability are included in the exhibition through Dummet's work, a "live investigation" that resulted in an installation piece. Understanding that different communities have different sustainability issues, Diaz and co-curator Annette Hurtig (the Dunlop's director) chose to focus on local artists and voices.

Over and over again, these artists ask the viewer uncomfortable questions, and refuse to let up. Lee Henderson's performance and installation piece, "Collapse and Replication," raises the issue of livestock management. Viewers stack ceramic cows one on top of another only to see them all come crashing down.

Another piece, "Mobile Perspective: A vehicle for (in)digestion," an installation with video by Kim Morgan of Regina, demonstrates car culture, our increasing dependence on the automobile.

Hoping to reach a larger part of the community, *Resisting Arrest* is not limited to the space offered by the Dunlop. A comprehensive approach that includes public works and performance pieces ensures that this exhibition is presented to the community in more ways than one.

Outside the gallery, several of the curbs in the typically bleak concrete parking lot have been patched by ceramic artist, Rory MacDonald.

A professor of ceramics at the University of Regina with a particular interest in community development, MacDonald has intervened in the continuous decay of the curbs in his piece, "Curb Works."

Robin Poitras, the New Dance Horizons artistic director who has been leaving her creative mark on this community for more than 20 years, contributed a performance piece to the exhibition. "Les femmes fontenelles" honours water's essential role in sustaining life, while also raising questions about society's exploitation of the resource.