

Creating on the backroads

*Artists share vision
with each other and
now with the public*

Arts groups are for sharing. Sharing between members, and ultimately sharing with the public. Studio 2880 is the headquarters for arts groups in Prince George and it is alive each Thursday night at 7:30 for those intent on building their skills in the visual arts. Painting and drawing. Many of the area's top artists have been members of the Artist's Workshop and many still are. Any skeptics of the group can see their results on the walls of Art Space this week.

The Artist's Workshop looked to its members for the group exhibit 'Backroads' up now in the Art Space gallery. Dozens responded with paintings of all kinds as they explored the theme.

"We let everyone interpret 'Backroads' as they wanted. Maybe the backroads of their lives, maybe the backroads of their mind, maybe backroads you found travelling..." says Sylvia Swennumson, vice president of Artist's Workshop and one of the con-



Painters from the Artist's Workshop go down a new road.

tributing artists.

There are about a dozen active, regular members of the group and about 30 in total that take part in at least some activities. There are regular classes held, occasional group projects like this one, weekly meetings to strategize the group's affairs, plus some Community Arts Council activities. Mostly these aspiring artists, some just beginning and some well established, are together for the fellowship of art.

"For beginners it is very nurturing. The long-time members help out a great deal with the new members," says Sandra Chow, one of the newest of the bunch.

"We meet other people with similar interests, and of course it is all about learning new skills to apply to your art. You don't necessarily do your best work during that two hours of class time, but you take it away with you, work on it at home, work through it for yourself," says Marika Ainley, one of the more established artists in the 'Backroads' show.

For many local painters the Artist's Workshop is their first introduction to public exhibition. Some of the 'Backroads' artists have never hung their work in a public place before and it can be a daunting step. Art is often a very private expression, not to mention a highly specialized set of skills slowly learned. To open that up to public discussion is a big undertaking for some.

"It takes on a whole other life to see your work out in public," says Tara Howarth, another contributing artist. "I remember for Studio Fair there were people putting in work for the first time who were quite nervous about it and there were more experienced members being quite encouraging about getting it in."

Many of the paintings hanging in the 'Backroads' show are for sale. All are up for viewing and discussion. The grand opening takes place April 20 at 7:30 at Art Space.

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Practice important, performance makes it worth it

example Matthew van Buuren is only 10 years old but he is in five categories.

"This is my second year in Speech Arts Festival," he says. "I just try to memorize each one verse by verse. I always pick humorous ones." Like the one he does with partner Stephen Cluff (recently seen in the PG Theatre Workshop production of *Macbeth*) about the Monopoly game that almost ends up in a fight over customized rules.

Kimberley Cook is also in five categories and at 11 years old is already a vet-

eran of the festival. She looks forward to it each year. "I like practicing, learning the pieces, having fun. Performing is my favourite," she says, her eight-year-old sister Jennifer nodding agreement. Both have a command of their body language and facial expression when they deliver a monologue. When asked if they ever feel stage fright Kimberley quite confidently says "No" and Jennifer adds a sure "Nope" of her own. Matthew goes even farther. He says "It's not like you

are competing for your life or anything, it's just to have fun. Plus you get to skip a lot of school."

There are awards on the line, though, and some spots at the B.C. Festival of the Arts (this year in Fort St. John). Everybody will have their work cut out for them. The local festival is one of the largest in Canada and this year it is laden with 750 entries.

"Seven hundred and fifty is good. That's nice and high. It's about what we had last year, too, which is great to see," says spokesperson

Pat Paul, one of the many volunteers working to put the festival together. The festival is preceded by the Choral Speech Festival on now at Lakewood Alliance Church until April 20. The main Speech Arts Festival then starts on April 22 and runs through to April 27 at UNBC. The the Honours Performance is May 6.

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