

Between the lines; living library combines visual and oral arts



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By Corrinna Pole
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While galleries are thought of as a place of quiet reflection touched by contemplative mummings, the atmosphere at the Foreman Gallery will be notably energized this evening for the final instalment of Neighbour to Neighbour: Living Libraries.

Curator Yael Filipovic of the gallery's Community Art Lab and Literacy in Action director Kathy Richan created an exhibition project that challenged the notion that knowledge is acquired from books and engages visitors in gaining knowledge from those living around them.

"When we began collaborating with Kathy at Literacy in Action I was overwhelmed with how much knowledge she had on literacy and the community... for us there's a visual literacy here as well," said Filipovic. "The idea of the Living Library is in an art gallery but it goes further into what we can exchange. With a gallery you come to get something from the artists sharing their work, but here we're switching it to what can be given to the community."

Roughly three weeks before the holidays Filipovic and Richan issued a call

for local volunteers of all ages willing to share their knowledge with the community.

"When we started thinking about it, it started with focusing on recruiting older people, you think about grandparents and how they have a wealth of knowledge to share," said Filipovic. "But it was important for me that we have younger people as well because they also have information with sharing. A 16 year old has pertinent information to share just as a 60 year old does."

The response to their call was so great they easily secured 33 living books to participate and were forced to turn many other volunteers away.

"There's so much variety about what people want to share," said Filipovic. "Some want to share their personal experiences and others want to share a skill such as how to speak Spanish or how to sharpen a chainsaw, which seems to be an especially popular topic."

The exhibition uses the gallery to create an interactive space where community members can share their experiences and knowledge on topics such as the history of Lennoxville, aboriginal midwifery, traveling by caravan in Mexico, theatre directing and longboarding, through conversations.

To the left of the gallery's entrance a wall is adorned with the selection of living books that can be taken out.

"The volunteers were asked to share two or three lines about what they wanted to talk about and the language they preferred speaking in and there are sign out cards, like in a real library, with suggestive time slots for people to take them out," explained Filipovic.

Various coloured block seating for books and listeners to engage in one-on-one conversations are placed throughout the room.

"We didn't put a lot of rules and guidelines in place for this because we understand that some conversations can be short and others can be long," Fil-

ipovic said. "Some books are eager to share and it doesn't take much to get them going but sometimes it takes a little encouragement to get them going."

In the centre of the room is Filipovic's favourite part of the installation, a feature that resembles a giant open book.

"I really like it because of the idea that you have your living book sharing inside a book," she said.

A section has been created near the back welcoming visitors to share their thoughts on two questions.

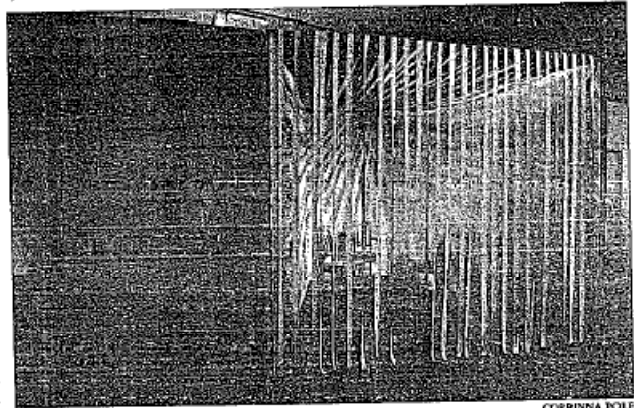
"We ask why do conversations matter to get people thinking about what it means to them to be able to share between each other, what we get out of it and what it would be like to not have it," said Filipovic. "The other question, what have you learned from your city, allows us to think about the information learned from the place we live in and

what its given to us."

The first instalment of the exhibition, which took place last Thursday, was a "wonderful" success according to Filipovic.

"The whole space was transformed. There was this din created by people talking but it wasn't an uncomfortable noise, it was really great," she said. "I was excited about the mixing of languages, people who specified on their card that they could only speak in one language were open to talking in another language."

The last day to "check out" a living book is Tuesday, January 18, from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Foreman Art Gallery of Bishop's University. A complete list of topics can be found on the Art Gallery's website at www.ubishops.ca/foreman. The art installation will be on display until January 20.



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The Neighbour to Neighbour: Living Libraries exhibition at the Foreman Gallery has blended art and knowledge in a project, which highlights the value of learning through conversations. Visitors are invited to "check out" a living-breathing book to learn from their experience and explore the art installation including an oversized volume that they can really get between the pages of.