



Winnipeg artist Bistyek's latest exhibition comes from a personal understanding of war.

JESSICA LEE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

ART of war

Winnipeg painter's first-hand experience with conflict colours his new exhibition

BEN WALDMAN

A MOTHER cradles her infant as bombs fall behind her. Her eyes are closed as the baby sleeps in her arms. This child was meant to be born into a world of hope and peace and love and serenity. Instead, war.

Bistyek, the artist responsible for the painting, knows war, and he didn't choose to meet it. Now 25 years old and living in Winnipeg, with pierced ears and wide eyes, Bistyek was once a child in Afrin, a Kurdish village in the northern part of Syria. He lived there, until war made him live elsewhere. Now, he lives here.

ART PREVIEW

- By Bistyek
- 300 Ross Ave.
- To April 15, 1-7 p.m.
- Info at bistkek.ca

War. It interrupts. It severs. It demoralizes. It kills. It ruins. It is a product and a producer of evil. War is a violation of life.

When Bistyek — a name that means '21' in his native tongue — thinks of war, he doesn't think of borders or politics or strategy, or the calibre of the gun. He thinks of the people caught in the crossfire, who did nothing to put themselves in the middle of the fog aside from being born and choosing to live.

So when he heard that an invasion had occurred in Ukraine, by Russian forces, he didn't need to turn on the news to comprehend who was right and

who was wrong. He didn't feel compelled to dive into reports of geopolitics. He knew what was happening was reprehensible, immoral, unjustifiable. He had not been to Ukraine, but he didn't need to use his imagination to understand the terror the mothers felt, or the fear in the souls of the young boys who would soon become young men. He knew war and this was it.

So Bistyek did what he knows how to do: he painted. "In two days I made seven paintings," he says in his studio in the Exchange District. In three weeks, he had finished 10.

He looked into the faces of the current war and saw the faces he had been forced to leave behind. He saw his mother and his aunts and his siblings and his neighbours and the people whose names he never learned but whose faces he cannot forget.

There's the mother with the child. A man screaming. A woman carrying a suitcase. The disjointed visage of a human being in distress, fingernails coat-

ed in blood, tears welling in their eyes, nostrils flaring, pupils dilated, gazing straight out in what must be shock but what might somehow be hope.

"When Russia invaded Ukraine, it reminded me of Afrin, of Afghanistan, of all of the wars that are happening and all of the wars that happened in the past," he says. "For me, I was thinking, 'Come on. Another one?' The world does not need more children dying, more women dying, more men dying, more refugees searching for home. It's terrible. I am not a stranger to those kinds of feelings. When I see war — it could be in Ukraine, or the Middle East or in Africa — I feel pain. I feel the sadness. I want to stop it. But what can I do?"

"It's just this," he says, gesturing to his showroom, filled with works of heart and heartache. "I say it on a canvas. Say it out loud. Say it unfiltered. F--- war."

● CONTINUED ON C2



Contrary to the way we might think of war zones, Winnipeg artist Bistyek's paintings are full of colour.



JESSICA LEE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Film fest really ties the rooms together

ALISON GILLMOR

WINNIPEG'S Architecture + Design Film Festival, now in its 11th year, is still the only Canadian fest dedicated to the importance of architecture and design in everyday life.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected design, including the way people feel about public and private spaces, and this year's festival will follow a hybrid model showing some films live at Cinematheque, with others also available for online viewing through Cinematheque at Home. And here's a bonus: Some screenings are free.

Here are a few standouts:

- *Magical Imperfection: The Life and Architecture of Moriyama* (Thursday, noon, Cinematheque, free screening) — Filmmaker Scott Calbeck uses interviews, archival photos and animation to craft an intimate and moving portrayal of Canadian architect Raymond Moriyama, the man behind such landmark projects as the Canadian War Museum and the Toronto Reference Library.
- Profoundly marked by anti-Asian racism and his family's experience of being interned as "enemy aliens" during the Second World War, Moriyama's humanist approach to architecture finds eloquent expression here, in his works and his words.

- *Building Bastille* (today, 7 p.m., Cinematheque; today to Sunday via Cinematheque at Home) is a great architectural underdog tale. In 1982, French president François Mitterrand opened a double-blind design competition for a modern opera house. It was to be built near the site of the Bastille prison to mark the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.
- The jury, which was reportedly confident they had picked a design by star American architect Richard Meier, was perhaps nonplussed to find out the plan was actually by an unknown Uruguayan-born Canadian architect, Carlos Ott.
- CONTINUED ON C2



Audrey Hepburn makes her selection in a scene from *The Automaton*.

THEAUTOMAT.CO

Inaugural Changemakers glad to ‘trigger conversations’

SADAF AHSAN

TORONTO — Kayla Grey, Kathleen Newman-Bremang and Amanda Parris say being named winners of the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television’s inaugural Changemaker Award is “a daunting honour” but also “a hopeful sign” of change to come.

The award, which will be presented at Sunday night’s Canadian Screen Awards, recognizes those bringing attention to systemic racism and promoting equity and inclusion in Canadian media.

“For the Canadian Screen Awards to give us this honour, I think they are also committing to more work,” says the Toronto-based Newman-Bremang, deputy director of Unbothered, Refinery29’s online community for Black women.

“You can’t put the three of us on something and say that you respect our work if you’re not also willing to continue this conversation.”

For this trio, that conversation has often been about how to create more space for fellow Black journalists and how to amplify stories that are not being heard.

A 2021 diversity survey by the Canadian Associations of Journalists found 75 per cent of nearly 3,900 respondents were white compared to just 10 per cent who were Asian, six per cent who were Indigenous and three per cent who were Black.

“I’m part of a continuum of people that have been consistently attempting to push this industry into spaces that it keeps on saying it doesn’t want to go,” says the Toronto-based Parris, CBC host, playwright and screenwriter.

“I am only able to do this work because of the work of the people that came before me, and I’m doing it for the people that are coming after me.”

But, she adds, it’s hard to say if significant change has come, “because the doors that have been opened and the spaces that have been made have not been structural, meaning they can be closed up again.

“Until there is structural change, then I don’t know that the idea of a changemaker makes the most sense,” she says.

“I think we trigger conversations, we infiltrate, we subvert, but I don’t know that it’s on us, we don’t have that kind of power.”

For Grey, the first Black woman to host a flagship sports show in the country with TSN’s *The Shift*, the label of “changemaker” is a tough one because she considers working to help her own simply who she is — not something “radical.”

“I get introduced as ‘the first’ and I don’t want to be that anymore,” says the Toronto native.

“I want to be like, ‘Yes, and look who’s come behind me and who is beside me.’ This industry doesn’t ensure that people that look like me are not the last, and it’s lonely.

“It’s such a beautiful feeling to be and work around people that look like you and I want people to truly experience that here.”



TJANA MARTIN / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Changemaker Kayla Grey of TSN can’t wait until we get past celebrating ‘the first’.

Sunday’s celebration, set to air on CBC and CBC Gem, will focus on the marquee film and TV categories. Overall nominations are led by the Indigenous thriller *Night Raiders* and CBC’s gender-fluid millennial dramedy *Sort Of*.

The first of several virtual award shows kicked off Monday with the broadcast news, and the documentary and factual categories. CTV’s Lisa LaFlamme was named best national anchor, CBC’s *The National* won best national newscast and APTN’s Tina House was awarded best national reporter.

Other ceremonies to unfold nightly this week include salutes to sports programming, children’s and animation, lifestyle and reality, drama and comedy crafts, and cinema.

Parris says she finds joy in working to connect with a diverse audience, broaden the CBC’s reach and court the next generation.

But she says “there is a degree of weight that comes with that.”

“You add on ancestral responsibility and you’re feeling it on so many levels, the pressure that we all carry with us.

“You wonder what it would be like if I weren’t walking with all of those things, how would my imagination run free?”

Newman-Bremang says there is a privilege to the pressure, because there have been so few Black women



Changemaker award is a ‘hopeful sign,’ says Kathleen Newman-Bremang, director of Unbothered.

in the same rooms as they’ve been and, with time, there comes an ability to navigate those white spaces and speak to those white supervisors.

Which, in the end, can lead to creating new spaces and hiring new supervisors who look much more like them.

According to that same CAJ survey, white respondents made up at least eight out of 10 supervisory roles, while Black respondents were twice as likely to work part-time jobs as full-time jobs.

It’s a key reason why the biggest change that this year’s changemakers would like to see is the hiring of more Black, Indigenous and people of colour,



TJANA MARTIN / THE CANADIAN PRESS

Amanda Parris says the Changemaker awards will spark a move to keep the doors open.

especially in executive roles.

“Change doesn’t happen at entry-level,” says Parris.

Retention, too, is important, Grey says, and must come with active support for employees of colour, a healthier work culture, and “real conversations” about fair pay.

Ultimately, it’s work these women hope to see the entire industry come together to do, though building a bridge for those who look like them will always be a priority.

“We’re at that pivotal moment where we can break the system because we’re in. That, to me, is why there’s immense pressure, but I don’t shy away from it,” says Grey.

“I embrace it, because it is such a privilege to be invited into these rooms and be given tools to knock down walls so that more people can show up and join us in these spaces ... so that we can all say, ‘I am thriving.’”

— The Canadian Press

ART OF WAR ● FROM C1

That four-letter word that can’t be printed, and that three-letter word that is printed far too frequently, unite to form the title for Bistyek’s current exhibition, in a gallery space on Ross Avenue, adjacent to the former Cosman’s Furniture shop on Princess Street.

Inside the gallery, Bistyek’s verbal statement is diffused into something visual one does not often associate with war: colour.

Close your eyes and picture a war zone: it’s probably grey and black and white. There’s rubble and crumbling concrete. Any spark of colour is incendiary in nature, and any face that can be seen is masked in a terror unlike any other. Even the faces are grey and ashen. The clothes too.

But that’s not the war Bistyek sees when he closes his eyes. War is not colourless. An unfair trick that war plays is that the colour remains: something meant to connote joy is rendered joyless. Green comes to represent not grass but tanks and camouflage. Red is not a rose but blood. No longer fire in the heavens, orange becomes the fire of an airstrike.

When Bistyek closes his eyes and thinks of war, he sees those colours for what they are, for what they were and what he hopes they soon will be.

Inside the gallery, which is huge and sparse, with white walls, those colours explode. And in front of them are faces — emotive, effusive faces. They feel pain and it is incontrovertible.

But walk along far enough, and you’ll find yourself in a smaller al-



JESSICA LEE / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Syrian-born painter Bistyek, 25, was displaced by war.

cove where there are people, but they look different.

“In here, they have no faces,” says Bistyek. This is another reality of war: it anonymizes. It wipes clean the demarcations of the individual and thrusts them into the collective. Some are on the side of the brutalizer and others are on the side of the brutalized, but all are enmeshed in the same brutality.

In this room there is a faceless, nameless boy in fatigues, raising his right hand to his brow in salute to something he does not understand and should not have ever had to understand. There is a uniform on fire. There is a soldier carrying in his hands a fallen dove.

War makes victims, Bistyek says. It forces people to fight when they should be able to know peace. It com-

pels the innocent to make choiceless choices to protect themselves and their loved ones. It scatters people like seeds in the wind.

Bistyek knows this. “My family has never all been together in the same room,” he says, sitting in his studio a day before his show opens. They’ve gotten close, but there are always one or two or three who are somewhere else, not by choice, but by circumstance.

It’s these thoughts that enter his mind when he paints. That even in a new country thousands of kilometres away from the place where he was born, he cannot forget, and will not forget, the pain of war.

“It is truly a terrible thing.”

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WINNIPEG’S ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN FILM FESTIVAL ● FROM C1



The Automat will screen at Cinematheque on Friday and Saturday.

This stranger-than-fiction real-life story has comedy, drama and suspense, and it’s told with loads of energy and charm. Canadian filmmaker Leif Kaldor explores the passionate ideological tangle of French politics, the crazy unpredictability of the architectural competition system, and the sheer improbability that any big projects get built at all.

● *Paradise Lost, History in the Un-making* (Friday, noon, Cinematheque, free screening) — Wryly funny and gently melancholy, this cinematic essay by artist Andy Howlett looks at the life and slow death of the Birmingham Central Library.

Like so many massive concrete structures, the library, designed by John Madin in 1974, was both celebrated as a Brutalist masterpiece and decried as an out-of-touch eyesore.

Howlett tenderly explores the run-down building, with its staircases that go nowhere and half-walls that seem to serve no purpose, trying to track not just the decay of this specific structure but also the failure of the city’s modernist dreams for meaningful public spaces. The journey is thought-provoking, personal, wandering, weird and

filled with deadpan English humour.

● *The Automat* (Friday, 7 p.m., Saturday, 1 p.m., Cinematheque, or Cinematheque at Home, today to Sunday): A genuine crowd-pleaser, this endearingly enthusiastic documentary combines affecting anecdotes with a fascinating social history of food. Filmmaker Lisa Hurwitz takes a nostalgic look at Horn and Hardart Automats, which made up the largest restaurant chain in the United States in the pre-fast-food days. In these convenient, well-designed spots, customers peered into little windowed compartments and then put coins into slots to retrieve everything from creamed spinach to apple pie.

At a time when full-service restaurants could be snooty, intimidating and often racist, the egalitarian model of the Automat, with its DIY service and communal tables, offered a place for everybody. Hurwitz brings together wonderful archival footage of old New York and Philadelphia, along with interviews with such Automat fans as Colin Powell, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and a wonderfully opinionated Mel Brooks.

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