

Artist transforms walls for Family Information Centre, Fort Garry United Church

Murals bring colour, play, inspiration

JULIA-SIMONE RUTGERS

ROBIN Love likes to think of her painting style as “playful.” “I like to tune into a child-like fantasy world that’s kind of pop-surreal fantasy. I describe it as ethereal because of the colours. It plays with this duality: it’s very bright and vibrant, but sometimes there’s an eerie darkness to it,” the 39-year-old mother of two says on a phone call. “I love colour play.”

Such an attention to brightness, colour and play caught the attention of a group of dedicated employees serving the south Winnipeg community from a collection of offices in a church basement this past summer.

At the time, the walls of the South Winnipeg Family Information Centre’s rented space in the basement of Fort Garry United Church were “a dull, muddy brown-ish colour,” says executive director Tricia Robinson, and the team was looking out for a way to brighten its halls.

Enter Love and her vision for a colourful portal-style mural that would invite hope and optimism to the one-dreary walls.

“Robin’s work just brought life to the area,” says Robinson. “It’s just kind of enveloped the whole room in a feeling of being outdoors, of the joy of nature.”

With an artistic style marked by whimsy, attention to detail, and love for her home province’s sprawling prairie landscapes and wildlife, the family centre commissioned Love to paint an eye-catching mural; first on one wall, and then throughout the triangular office space.

“They wanted something bright and encompassing, that made everyone feel welcome,” says Love. “I liked the idea of this rainbow that surrounded the world. You could walk through it and be taken to our environment, but super happy.”

Love’s portal mural centres on a rainbow arch, through which a vibrant world of flora and fauna come alive. Monarch butterflies — a symbol of transformation — dance around a gnarled tree spotted with yellow stars. An eagle soars above the rainbow’s arc; a fish leaps through piles of rainbow waves.

Love, who is Métis and born in Russell, says she wanted to imbue the mural with imagery that connected familiar elements of the Prairie landscape with

Indigenous cultural concepts, all while maintaining her bright and playful personal style.

“I really kind of just wanted to embrace a part of me that I really haven’t done in a lot of art,” she says.

For staff at the South Winnipeg Family Information Centre, who have largely worked in isolation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mural brought new hope to dark days.

“All those worries: are we helping people enough, is the organization going to be OK? At those moments, I would be able to go out into that little space, and when you stand in front of the portal you really feel enveloped by it,” said Robinson.

The mural was completed at the end of the summer and has since been shared with members of the organizations programs via Zoom. Those working from the office, however, are excited for visitors to get to see it in person, in due time.

“You can imagine yourself not in a basement anymore, you’re in a lovely space and it transports you to a hopeful place where you can see that things are going to get better and there is hope and joy still to come. I certainly drew a lot of strength from that,” says Robinson.

Love’s work also made an impression on the centre’s landlords.

Former board chair at Fort Garry United Church, Dianne Cooper, says it has always worked to make sure public art helps communicate the church’s message and values to the community.

“We work away at all sorts of programming — and public art would be one of them — to give people an opportunity to see that we’re a bunch of people who value inclusiveness, openness and creativity,” says Cooper.

“Sometimes, it’s just a matter of when they drive by, they notice something or think about something they haven’t thought about before.”

The church has hung red dresses and orange ribbons in recent times, but in



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preparation to celebrate its 100th anniversary, felt a mural on its outdoor walls could perhaps attract new eyes.

Already enamoured with Love’s work in the building’s basement, Cooper says the board was eager to commission her for another mural

— this time to be hung on plywood slats outside the church.

“We wanted it to communicate that music is a big value in our sharing... We wanted to share a little bit of our connections and outreach with Indigenous people, and the (LGBTQ+ community),” said Cooper.

The mural depicts two hands, one dark-skinned and another fair-skinned, holding a dream catcher ringed with the four colours of the medicine wheel; music notes woven through the background communicate an emphasis on the power of connection in song; and the painted words ‘All are welcome’ drive the mural’s theme home.

“They wanted the same idea of all-encompassing, all-inclusive,” says Love, who found the second mural more challenging, but important in its message.

Both Love and the church hope the mural will inspire passersby to think about something new; perhaps the relationship between churches and Indigenous peoples, perhaps challenging their perspectives on what values churchgoers may represent.

“It is a church and there’s a lot of pain there — I thought that I wanted to show there’s a spectrum of cultures and ethnicities that do have a love for Indigenous people, and they are trying,” says Love.

Ultimately, the artist says she is “humbled” by the opportunity to bring new life to the inside and outside walls of Fort Garry United, and is grateful her art brings light and joy to those who see it.

“I have a sense of pride,” she says. “I love that they make people happy.”

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Robin Love painted the Rainbow Portal mural inside the South Winnipeg Family Information Centre rented space in the basement of Fort Garry United Church.



Love’s All are Welcome mural, commissioned for display outside Fort Garry United Church.

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Lions Club of Winnipeg marks 100 years of serving community

AARON EPP VOLUNTEERS



A LOCAL service club is marking a major milestone this month.

The Lions Club of Winnipeg was chartered on Nov. 26, 1921. Club members celebrated the 100th anniversary with a special dinner at the Fort Garry Hotel on Saturday.

The club is part of Lions International. Established in 1917, the organization has more than 48,000 clubs around the world — including a handful in Winnipeg — with the motto, “We serve.”

The volunteer members of the Lions Club of Winnipeg have proudly supported a variety of efforts over the years, including Lions Housing Centres, which provides affordable housing for people 55 and older; and Camp Manitou, a summer camp for youth just outside the city.

Club president Rick Pinchin joined the Lions when his father recruited him in 1971. The first big club event he attended was its 50th anniversary dinner, also held at the Fort Garry Hotel. The black-tie affair was Pinchin’s first date with Pat, the woman who would become his wife.

“I guess I was inclined to be a volunteer at that point,” says Pinchin, 75, a semi-retired accountant. “Maybe it was just following my father’s footsteps in many respects. He was an active volunteer.”

A Lions initiative dear to Pinchin is its support of a lunchtime program at Gordon Bell High School that helps students improve their public speaking skills. The group includes newcomer and refugee students who have faced challenges in their lives that Pinchin can barely imagine.

“Many of them have only spoken English for a few years, and the courage they have shown to participate in



Longtime Lions Club of Winnipeg members Hannon Bell (left), Rick Pinchin and Doug Blaylock stand in front of Lions Manor.

our speaking club program, and then get up and deliver speeches in English, is wonderful,” Pinchin says.

Like Pinchin, Hannon Bell was inspired by his father to join the Lions. Leon Bell was a 50-year member who was Lion of the Year in 1992 and president in 1997-98.

The younger Bell joined the club in 2011. Since then, the retired real estate agent has kept busy attending weekly club lunches, organizing guest speakers, writing the monthly club newsletter, serving on the executive and the Lions housing board, and volunteering at club activities.

“There is something in me that loves being involved, meeting different people from all walks of life and getting the sense of making a difference,” says Bell, 71. “We serve, we volunteer, we give back, but most of all, we are part of the community. The sense of doing good is immeasurable.”

In addition to numerous fundraising activities over the years, the Lions Club of Winnipeg has sponsored the Jim Whitecross Air Cadet Squadron annually since 1942. The Lions-founded squadron promotes leadership and physical fitness among youth.

Doug Blaylock, a 26-year member of the Lions, says it’s an honour to serve as chairman of the squadron’s sponsorship committee.

“I enjoy seeing these great, great young people have an avenue to form leadership with the responsibilities they take on,” the 52-year-old financial planner says. “The maturity of these

Volunteer opportunities

THE following is a list of volunteer opportunities for Winnipeg and surrounding areas. For more information about these listings, please contact the organization directly. Volunteer Manitoba does not place volunteers with organizations but can assist you in finding an opportunity. To learn more about its programs and services, go to www.volunteermanitoba.ca or call 204-477-5180.

- Empathy Squad makes a difference through the power of storytelling. Volunteers will collect stories, learn podcasting skills, meet new people from different walks of life and collaborate with future leaders. The program is about 12 hours a week, with a commitment of 12 weeks, in a virtual setting across Canada. Apply at <http://wfp.to/HNY> before Dec. 1.

- Friends Housing operates a 28-unit apartment building providing supported, independent living for people with mental illnesses, and a 15-unit townhouse complex for low-income families. Board members are needed. Previous board experience — or accounting, legal or fundraising expertise — would be an asset but is not necessary. Go to <http://wfp.to/HDP> to learn more about Friends Housing. Apply to board chairman John Gosselin at jgosseli@mts.net. The deadline is Nov. 30.

young people... is just phenomenal.”

Like other service clubs, the Lions Club of Winnipeg has faced dwindling membership in recent years. It once had more than 130 members; today, there are 25.

Pinchin encourages anyone who is interested to visit e-clubhouse.org/sites/winnipeg, call 204-204-784-1236 or email lcwveserve@gmail.com.

“There’s just an awful lot of joy and happiness that can be derived by being out there and helping others in the community,” he says. “I would hope that more folks consider taking advantage of that.”

If you know a special volunteer, please contact aaron.epp@gmail.com.