

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Studio makes an impression

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The Hamilton Spectator

(Dec 3, 2008)

As the galleries and stores of James Street North brighten their tuning to a festive key this weekend, The Print Studio will be doing its part. As it always does in the neighbourhood.

After all, the very art of print-making is defined by giving and receiving -- of impressions. And it is a pattern -- the giving and receiving -- that seems to be inked right into the veins of the place, enlarging the spirit of the work that The Print Studio does for its membership and for the community.

Friday brings the the kickoff of holiday season on James Street North. And in recognition, many window shelves will be tricked out in seasonal finery, with displays in the manner of the old Eaton's window tradition. (Catch them -- they're impressive.)

The Print Studio always has an attractive street front, at 173 James St. N. Its exhibitions are visible through the window, along with the antique press.

But the layout that The Print Studio is concentrating on now is tucked away from public view, on the second floor. There, workers are building the facility's new digital print lab, featuring, among other acquisitions, an oversize printer.

When finished, it will be the only noncommercial digital print lab in the area. Now print artists must travel to Toronto or go to a commercial outlet, where the expense is greater and there are restrictions on creative control.

"Here the artists can run things themselves," says The Print Studio's co-founder Colina Maxwell. "You can only do so many proofs at a commercial printers, and if it doesn't come out right The artist loses control."

But the studio hopes not only to be giving the city access to a digital print lab, but also to be receiving.

The Print Studio has been nominated for a Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts. The arts organization award is a \$50,000 prize, which would give the studio a salary for an administrative director, to supplement Alison Judd as studio director.

It would be hard to find a more deserving candidate. The Print Studio, which is not-for-profit, runs all kinds of education programs for kids in area schools, including an eco-art program in partnership with the Hamilton Naturalists' Club.

It is running a print program for staff at the Juravinski Cancer Centre, using art as a parallel with medicine. And the studio is printing the T-shirts for the Design Hope auction and CD launch at 270 Sherman Ave. N. on Friday at 7 p.m.

At the creative end, The Print Studio brings internationally renowned printmakers to Hamilton. This spring it is hosting Japanese printer Yoshiko Shimada as artist-in-residence.

The Print Studio characterizes its function as a meshing of arts, community and education -- ACE, they call it, says Ingrid Mayrhofer, an independent curator with the studio. It is their "ecology of practice," she says.

In terms of size alone (and that is but a fraction of its importance) The Print Studio is one of the true pivots of the arts rejuvenation on James Street North. The digital lab will add to its influence, attracting more users and visitors.

With 9,000 square feet of space devoted to printmaking, exhibition and education, The Print Studio is a huge presence on James North, a roaring engine of creativity and technical productivity.

People in the city knew it would be. When Maxwell and her former Print Studio partner Katherine Zarull bought the old surplus store, there was a real buzz about it.

"At the time, Hamilton needed a place for printers to work and gather," says Maxwell. "And we were determined to have it here, downtown."

Maxwell -- an ex-Torontonian who has fallen in love with Hamilton -- mortgaged her home to purchase the building (she bought out Zarull last year) and though she owns it, The Print Studio is truly run by its membership.

What money it makes -- from art sales, user fees and grants (generous ones from Turkstra Lumber, Trillium, Dofasco, to name a few) is funnelled right back in to the operation of its internal and outreach programs.

Check out History+Heritage, 165 James St. N., for maps and schedules of James North holiday season activities, including the window-dressing displays and The Makers' Market, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. inside historical Christ's Church Cathedral, 252 James St. N., starting Dec. 6 -- featuring locally made gifts of jewellery, cards, art, fashion, photography, screened T-shirts and much more.

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