

The puck stops here

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia turns itself over to Arena: The Art of Hockey, but don't think it's just for fans of game

By ELISSA BARNARD Arts Reporter

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A technician sets a spotlight near Chris Hanson and Hendrika Sonnenberg's Zamboni, made of polystyrene foam.

KNOW THE SCORE

Arena: The Art of Hockey runs to June 8 at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1723 Hollis St. Taking up three floors of the gallery are over 100 pieces of mainly Canadian contemporary art, from video to interactive sculpture to painting, about Canada's national obsession.

Special events

- Sunday, April 27, 1:30 p.m., all ages presentation about hockey by the Nova Scotia Sports Hall of Fame.
- Thursdays, 7 p.m., April 17, 24, May 1, 8, AGNS Film Series: Films on Ice
- Sunday, May 4, 1 p.m., Junior Films on Ice.
- Friday, May 9, 7:30 p.m.,

Celebration of the exhibition with an artists' reception and book launch.

•Saturday, May 10, 2 p.m.
Panel and walk through of the exhibit with artists and curator Ray Cronin.

•Sunday, May 11, 1 to 4 p.m., Game On!, a family Sunday event, and at 2 p.m., a walk through the exhibit with artists and the curator.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and to 9 p.m. on Thursday.

Admission: \$12 regular; \$10, senior; \$5, student; \$3, youth aged six to 17; free for kids five and under, \$25 for a family (two adults and three youth).

Website:
www.artgalleryofnovascotia.ca.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE an art lover or a hockey fan to enjoy Arena: The Art of Hockey, a playful and poignant exhibit of over 100 works that range from a life-sized Zamboni carved out of chilly green polystyrene to Ken Danby's iconic portrait of Wayne Gretzky on an ice rink beneath the stars, waving good-bye.

"You don't have to have an art knowledge to get this show," says curator Ray Cronin, a Montreal Canadiens fan who grew up playing road hockey.

On the other hand, if you don't know Sidney Crosby is famous for pounding pucks into his folks' dryer, you can enjoy work by many of Canada's top contemporary artists including Sobey Art Award winners Jean-Pierre Gauthier and Brian Jungen, painters Wanda Koop and Landon Mackenzie and sculptors Aganetha Dyck, James Carl and Greg Forrest, the Halifax artist whose massive bronze sculpture features the Stanley Cup on top of a dryer.

There is work celebrating hockey as well as criticizing it, Cronin said at a preview as Wanda Koop's fierce, masked Hockey Heads glowered behind him.

"There's work that will amaze and surprise you. There's work that might make some people a little ticked off."

There's also art to interact with, like Lisa Birke's music boxes that you open up to reveal spinning hockey players or Graeme Patterson's multi-media organ game with players that you move on a table top hockey board by pressing organ keys.

Belgian-born artist Thierry Delva, a NSCAD professor, has cut Tintin into the door of a freezer in a new work, called A Belgian in Canada, that he's made specifically for this show.

"Hockey is not part of my history but I understand the relationship between hockey and Canadian identity," he said. Tintin, the adventuring Belgian comic book character, is discovering the new world of hockey as pucks hit the freezer door, something Cronin connects to Crosby aiming pucks into his parents' dryer.

Nearby Delva has placed a 2003 loonie into the cement floor referring to the Salt Lake Loonie, the coin icemaker Trent Evans froze beneath centre ice for good luck during the Olympic hockey tournament in 2002.

"It's a 2003 loonie which is the year I became a Canadian citizen," says Delva, "and that's the year I figured I should pick a hockey team and the Senators were the only team up for grabs among my friends. I picked the Senators. I always liked the logo."

Several pieces in Arena rely on people knowing hockey lore, like Seoul-born artist Tim Lee's giant photograph of himself soaring over the ice like Bobby Orr did to make the famous winning goal in 1970 that gave the Bruins their first Stanley Cup in 29 years.

Andrew Hunter's large installation on the gallery's third floor connects two mysterious and tragic deaths, that of artist Tom Thomson and Toronto Maple Leaf hockey player Bill Barilko, famous for scoring the winning goal in overtime in the 1951 Stanley Cup finals. That summer Barilko, 24, and a friend died in a plane crash while on a fishing trip in northern Ontario. The Leafs didn't win another Stanley Cup until 1962 — the same year Barilko's remains were discovered.

Cronin got the idea for this exhibit, the biggest ever mounted at AGNS, when he heard Halifax would co-host with Quebec City the 2008 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Championships in May.

"I thought it was a perfect opportunity to look at how hockey is part of Canada's culture, what kind of impact it's had on contemporary art and how it works as a subject in Canadian art."

As he looked for art he was surprised by how much hockey art there was in Canada "and how little from other places," he said. "Making contemporary art about hockey seems to be a particularly Canadian thing."

He expected to find a lot of Canadiana. "I was surprised by how many really interesting, thoughtful works were being made using hockey to talk about larger issues." Those issues include manhood, being part of a team and hero worship.

"The Latvians will love this," IIHF event operations manager Michael LaLeune said Friday as he viewed a room full of wild and colourful hockey sticks in the piece Hockey Shtick. "There are 400 coming here and they love to party."

From May 2 to 18 there will be up to 5,000 hockey players, fans and journalists in downtown Halifax. Since each team plays every other day fans will be looking for other activities.

"It's two weeks people will be here and they are going to want to do more than hang out at the rink," says event manager Leroy McKinnon. "This is a good fit."

"I'm really glad this show is on," says LaLeune. "It'll add scope and breadth to our image as a city. What intrigues me is the range of ideas that come out of the central theme of hockey. The range is huge."

"Hockey is a great metaphor for life," says Cronin, who is acting director and chief curator at the AGNS.

Arena: The Art of Hockey is on exhibit until June 8 and will likely coincide with the Stanley Cup playoffs. Who will win the cup this year?

"The Montreal Canadiens," says Cronin.

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