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VISUAL ARTS

Artistic tug-of-war

Pulse exhibit showcases polarizing debate
 Published July 28, 2011 by [Meaghan Baxter](#) in [Visual Arts](#)

The push to hold on to tradition and the allure of experimentation has been a constant debate within the Alberta Society of Artists (ASA) since its inception. Now celebrating its 80th anniversary, the ASA has teamed up with Triangle Gallery to unveil *Pulse*, a commemorative exhibit in which traditionalism and modernism share the stage.

The opposing views of the two camps has been brewing since the society's inception in 1931. Founder A.C. Leighton strongly favoured realism and dismissed abstraction. Many viewed this ideology as too conservative, and it wasn't until H.G. Glyde succeeded him in 1947 that the ASA began to broaden its horizons.

Jacek Malec, curator and director of the Triangle Gallery, says it's this polarization that makes the society so interesting.

"If you only have one voice, it becomes boring and not encouraging," he says. "There's no kind of encouragement to go further and explore uncharted areas."

Despite inner conflict, the society played a pivotal role in the development of Alberta arts and culture and provided artists with a forum to elevate their work to a professional level.

Mary-Beth Laviolette, a highly respected art critic and author, is curator of the exhibit, and has addressed the opposing debate in a very subtle way.

Pulse is divided into two sections. The first is a collection of works from the ASA pioneers. The other features contemporary artists who stray beyond the conventional scope of the society.

Included in this world-class exhibit are Calgarian artists Bev Tosh, Bonnie Scott, Linda Daoust, Eveline Koliijn and Liv Pedersen.

Traditionally, the majority of artists in the ASA have been landscape painters. Many still use landscape as a primary subject matter, but approach it abstractly. Laviolette includes mediums such as fibres, printmaking and photography to tap into the present pulse of the group.

"I do certainly have a couple of artists who are working with the landscape as a theme, but the way in which they've interpreted or translated it is really different from the rest," she says.

Malec says the "pulse" is seen through the artists' experimentation and interpretation of these landscapes.

"They focus more on the process, and the landscape and subject matter is more of the background, rather than the primary focal point in their imagery," he says.

Audiences will be able to compare the parallels between the traditional and modern, despite the use of different mediums and artistic processes.

"The viewer needs time to go through and see that history," Malec says. "And how the contemporary works were informed by these historical traditions."

Laviolette says the ASA acted as an important catalyst for visual art in its early days and offers a sense of camaraderie in a profession that can often be very solitary.

"Even if the work you're making has nothing to do with anyone else, I don't think that's what's important. I think it's about a certain amount of support in numbers," she says. "I think it gives you the opportunity to have some exchange with people in your field."

Laviolette hopes audiences can appreciate that this is a group of artists who make this their full-time career, or at the very least, full-time practise, and not merely a hobby.

The artists of the ASA have reached beyond Alberta's borders, receiving national and even international critical acclaim.

"In the earlier years they used to create a lot of exhibitions and send them out across the

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Triangle Gallery's *Pulse* exhibit examines the constant artistic debate of traditional versus modernism. This is a Bev Tosh piece.

DETAILS

Pulse: Alberta Society of Artists at 80 Years curated by Mary-Beth Laviolette

[Triangle Gallery](#)
 Monday, July 11 - Wednesday, August 24

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country, which really helped create a profile for the visual arts in Alberta. It showed there was indeed something going on in the cultural scene in Alberta," says Lavolette.

Malec is hopeful *Pulse* will encourage the growth of the ASA as a society.

"I think this exhibition is sort of an example of how the future exhibitions or the juried shows of the ASA can look," he says. "You don't have to stick to tradition — you have to give the voice to the artists who are exploring the uncharted areas or pushing the envelope."

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