

# Impact Story: Mann Art Gallery

by  
**Dave Margoshes**



Saskatchewan  
Arts Alliance



"Art can strengthen our community by helping it understand and respect the different perspectives and experiences that artists are displaying."

In a city with an aboriginal population of more than 40 percent and a history of racial discord, Prince Albert's Mann Art Gallery is doing what it can to bridge the divide. As with many other cultural organizations in Saskatchewan, the idea of settler-indigenous reconciliation is never far from mind.

Case in point: "New Age Warriors," part-Dene artist Catherine Blackburn's brilliant exhibition blending traditional beadwork and modern photography that opened the gallery's new season this fall. (Note: this ends Oct. 25). Blackburn says she "was thrilled to have a major show" in her home town gallery.

"We try to be as relevant as possible," says gallery director/

curator Jesse Campbell. "Art can strengthen our community by helping it understand and respect the different perspectives and experiences that artists are displaying. Art is a great way to foster understanding. We're really engaged with what's going on in our city and province, and trying to use art as a way to look at all those issues."

Prince Albert being Saskatchewan's northernmost city, "There's no art gallery north of us," Campbell adds. "That's something that we're mindful of."

The Mann traces its roots back to the '70s when it began life as the Little Gallery in the old City Hall building, now known as the Prince Albert Art Centre. In 2003, the Little moved to its present location in

the new \$12 million E.A. Rawlinson Centre for the Arts, with a name change to Art Gallery of Prince Albert. It took on the Mann name in 2010 when the city's car dealership Mann family signed on as patrons.

The handsome building, which also houses the John and Olive Diefenbaker Theatre, is guarded by a larger-than-life wolf, its shining yellow eyes ever watchful, the work of Saskatchewan's pre-eminent sculptor Joe Fafard.

The current space, much larger than the original, houses three galleries. "It's allowed us to increase the variety of exhibitions," notes Campbell, with local emerging artists, school kids and community groups rubbing elbows with professionals. "It's a nice way of giving support to those artists who



Installation shot of Catherine Blackburn's "New Age Warriors" on display at the Mann Art Gallery from September 18 - October 25, 2018



are just in the process of building their practices.”

Lynda Monahan, current writer-in-residence at the P.A. library and active in the city’s cultural life, says the gallery “is a real feather in Prince Albert’s cap, bringing people together in celebration of art and instilling in our community a sense of pride, interaction and human connection.”

The Mann has a host of funders, including the Saskatchewan Art Board and Sask Lotteries, and Campbell says “we work hard applying for operational funds and a lot of project grants.” Still, Prince Albert’s art gallery gets by on considerably less money than any of those in the province’s

other mid-sized cities, like Moose Jaw and Swift Current. She’s quick to add that “we have a positive relationship with the city” – which is the Mann’s landlord, after all – “but we don’t get as much city support as we’d like.”

Despite that, Campbell feels that the presence of galleries in P.A. and other Saskatchewan’s cities “shows that the community needs and wants facilities where they can see and make art.

“We all know Saskatchewan is a conservative place, and you can’t help but wonder how art galleries can fit into that kind of environment. But we have a very vibrant arts community here. It’s a testament to even this facility

being built – it was a group of volunteer fund-raisers who spent a decade working to get this building up and running.

It says that regardless of whatever kind of social or political climate we’re in, there’s an intrinsic need to engage with art in a variety of ways.”

*Dave Margoshes is a fiction writer and poet living in the rural Saskatoon area after many years in Regina. He was a newspaper reporter and editor, in New York, San Francisco, Calgary, Vancouver and points between, before escaping to the literary life.*