

Love of art, math adds up

Painter Stebbins adds RBC prize to award-winning year

By **ELISSA BARNARD**
Arts Reporter

Mark Stebbins has come home to where his art career first took off.

The 31-year-old Sarnia, Ont., native won the \$10,000 Halifax Mayor's Award in June 2009, when he was living in Halifax and working at the Dalhousie Art Gallery.

He's back in the gallery this week as winner of the \$15,000 honorable mention in the 12th annual RBC Canadian Painting Competition. Paintings by all 15 finalists, chosen from 600 submissions, are on exhibit through Sunday in the Dalhousie gallery, where RBC hosted two receptions this week and handed out oodles of free catalogues.

Stebbins has had a wonderful year and a half of winning art awards — 11 in all — and the mayor's award was the first.

"The city prize was incredible," he says.

"That brought a great deal of recognition and visibility, at least here in Halifax, and the money allowed me the flexibility to be able to paint, during which time I made this picture."

This picture is Data Centres, an intricate, acrylic on wood image that won the RBC contest, and combines Stebbins' love of art and math, two passions he has had since high school.

"I wanted to work with the technological idea of a data centre but in a very loose, metaphorical way," says Stebbins, whose math marks got him a scholarship to study fine art at the University of Western Ontario, where he also took courses in computer science.

The painting, of acrylic pen over acrylic paint, is "a metaphorical way of looking at how information continues through a lot of different media." Stebbins is fascinated by patterns and draws both computer-age patterns of pixels and discs and traditional textile patterns taken from weaving, knitting and embroidery.

Young people feel as comfortable today manipulating an image with Photoshop as people did 80 years ago making quilts, says Stebbins. Both acts of making, though, deal with recording information, with memory and with visual imagery.

"There is no didactic message to my work," says Stebbins. "I think I'm in-



Artist Mark Stebbins won \$15,000 in the 12th annual RBC Canadian Painting Competition for his work Data Centres. The intricate, acrylic on wood image is on exhibit at the Dalhousie Art Gallery, along with paintings by all 15 finalists, through Sunday. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

terested in a sense of loss or transition. The information changes from one form to another and there is some element of gain and some element of loss. There is a sense of degradation, of transformation.

"The discs are a metaphor for information storage but they also look like doilies and something cellular. They are usually broken apart," he says.

"All things like a quilt will eventually break down and disappear and digital media is not permanent either. One of the problems is we have so much information. We have a harder time managing information. Things disappear in that overload."

It's important to Stebbins, who labours over a drafting board in his downtown Toronto studio while listening to music, to not create art on a computer.

"I'm still drawing by hand. The way I do it is very organic and human and it still is an object. It's still very physical in the way of making."

Stebbins first came to Halifax to get his

law degree from Dalhousie University and worked for a year at the university gallery as the education and outreach co-ordinator, as well as an assistant preparator. Though he may practise law someday, he decided to return to art making and moved to Toronto last October.

He has his first solo exhibit in Toronto at the Edward Day Gallery on Queen Street West opening Nov. 6.

Among his 11 art prizes are two awards he won at this summer's Toronto Art Fair, the biggest outdoor art fair in Canada, where he was one of 400 artists showing work. Stebbins won best in category and best in show.

"It was a huge surprise," he says. "It gave me a tremendous amount of visibility in Toronto."

As for the next year, "I probably won't win 11 awards. I don't think I can keep that up! I'll just keep working hard and aiming high."

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Paula Abdul will be coming to Halifax in March. (CHRIS PIZZELLO / AP)

Abdul steps up for Halifax's Bust a Move

Having brought in Richard Simmons and raised more than a million dollars in their first event, the organizers of Bust a Move for Breast Health had a lot to live up to.

They got the 2011 event off on the right foot by announcing Paula Abdul as the celebrity fitness leader for the second Bust a Move, a six-hour fitness fundraiser for breast health scheduled for March 26 at the new Canada Games Centre in Clayton Park.

"Paula was identified right off the bat as the perfect person for this event," said Steve Jennex of the QEII Foundation.

"She's a choreographer, a fitness expert, a celebrity, and with her involvement with American Idol, she's a top-of-the-line person. A perfect fit."

Funds raised from the 2010 event went to the acquisition of new digital mammography equipment. For 2011, the IWK Foundation and the QEII Foundation have targeted the next phase of the development of a world-class breast health centre, which will be located at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax.

"Since its launch last year, Bust a Move has become synonymous with energy, excitement and commitment to advancing world-class breast health services for Nova Scotia," volunteer chairwoman Sarah MacDonald said in a news release.

For more information, visit www.bustamove.ca.

ARTS IN BRIEF

Monkman brings Triumph of Mischief to SMU gallery

Kent Monkman is in town for tonight's 8 p.m. opening of his exhibit, Kent Monkman: The Triumph of Mischief, at Saint Mary's University Art Gallery to Nov. 28.

Monkman gives a talk and tour Saturday, 8 p.m., during Nocturne when the gallery is open 6 p.m. to midnight. The Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent and Saint Mary's University art galleries will provide free bus transportation to all three venues for Nocturne. For schedule and exhibit information, go to the gallery websites and Facebook.

Featured at the 17th Biennale of Sydney in May, Monkman is a Toronto-based artist of Cree, English and Irish ancestry. He draws inspiration from the colonial portrayals of aboriginal peoples in 19th century photography and painting, and classic Hollywood westerns. Within these conventions, he constructs new stories that provide missing narratives and perspectives of aboriginal peoples.

His work also explores stereotypes of masculinity and queer culture. At the centre of his work is his performance-art alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle.

The Triumph of Mischief, a collaborative project between the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, the Art Gallery of Hamilton and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV), assembles Monkman's giant paintings, sculptural spaces and objects, films, videos and photography from 2003 to the present.

Hear Confessions of a Mezzo at Astor, Pearl theatres

Witches, B*tches and Britches: Confessions of a Mezzo debuts this month on the South Shore.

The new show about opera, singers and singing, starring mezzo soprano Nina Scott-Stoddart and pianist Tara Scott will be at the Astor Theatre, Liverpool, on Wednesday, Oct. 20 and at the Pearl Theatre in Lunenburg, Friday, Oct. 22 at 7:30 p.m.

Since relocating to Nova Scotia from Toronto in 2002, Scott-Stoddart has worked as artistic producer for ONS's Opera Valentine and as stage director and general manager for Halifax Summer Opera Workshop. She directed the Dalhousie University Opera Workshop from 2006 to 2010.

Tickets are \$15. In Liverpool, tickets are

available from the Astor Theatre; Lunenburg tickets are available from Fulton's Pharmacy, Kinburn Pharmasave in Mahone Bay, Sagor's Books in Bridgewater, or call 634-4280.

Halifax Feast serves up Nonsense at deCoste

The Halifax Feast Theatre Company presents Nonsense, a spoof about the misadventures of five nuns trying to manage a fundraiser on Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the deCoste Centre in Pictou.

This is the second time Halifax Feast has toured a production to the deCoste — last year's presentation of Menopausal was a sellout. A wine and cheese reception follows the show.

Tickets are \$30, \$27 for students and seniors and are on sale at the deCoste Centre box office, www.decostecentre.ca, 485-8848 and at the door.

Mexico's Huichol inspire yarn art workshops

A yarn art workshop will be held at instructor Barbara Carter's home studio, 59 Sami Dr., Lower Sackville.

Workshops are offered from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Wednesdays Oct. 20 and Nov. 10 or Sundays, Oct. 17 and Nov. 7.

Cost is \$50 per workshop and all materials are provided.

This workshop is Carter's version of Yarn Art, inspired from the Huichol yarn paintings of Mexico.

Research pictures provided, as well as guidance in drawing a sketch if needed. No previous art experience is necessary and beginners are welcome.

Contact bcarter@eastlink.ca (preferred) or phone 252-6611.

Royal Winnipeg Ballet auditions in Halifax

Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet School will be in Halifax on Thursday as a part of the School's 2010-2011 International Audition Tour.

It is expected that between 600 and 800 hopeful Ballet Academic Program, Teacher Training Program and Aspirant Program students will audition to gain a spot in the summer session.

Halifax auditions will take place at Halifax Dance at the Maritime Centre at 1505 Barrington St. beginning at 9 a.m. For more information, visit the RWBSchool website at www.rwbschool.com or call the school office at 1-204-957-3467.

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Be part of history - This show will be filmed for an upcoming PBS special. There will be some disruptions with cameras moving around the venue and they could impair visibility for small portions of the show.