

FCA Meeting – January 17, 2013
Gallery Discussion with Larry Hanlon of the Peninsula Gallery

Call to order 7:00 pm

Minutes submitted via email by Kristina Boardman

Sharlene Stushnov-Lee, President, welcomed members to the meeting. Sharlene mentioned the upcoming show at the Coast Collective and the spring workshop with Deborah Tilby which will be held at the Saanich Fairgrounds. Detail and dates are noted in the January Grapevine. A registration form for the Coast Collective show has also been sent to members by email.

Sharlene introduced special guest **Larry Hanlon, owner of the Peninsula Gallery.**

Larry Hanlon grew up in Australia in a small mining town. He worked in construction, then left Australia in 1969 to travel to Europe & Canada. Along the way he visited many museums and galleries. In 1974, he owned a restaurant in Bastion Square next to Leafhill Gallery, when it was owned by Mrs. Kent. He started the Peninsula Gallery in 1986 with a business partner, Ron Otteson. His wife, Gillian has been his partner since 1997.

Larry spoke about his early interest in art. He lived in a small town in Australia where he tried drawing and Chinese brush painting. Larry had everyone laughing when he said he also took a course on painting and drawing and that the instructor told him to “find a barn and a brush”. He was moved by sculpture on an early trip to Europe. He mentioned that Rupert Murdoch had a newspaper called the Australian and that in the lobby of his building he had many sculptures done by well known artists. Larry was amazed at the high quality work that was on display and said that Mr. Murdoch did a lot to promote the arts in Australia. Larry said that he has done sculpture for his own interest but that what he really enjoys is helping his customers find that special piece of art for their blank wall.

From his experience working with many artists over the years, Larry has learned that artists must paint with passion rather than painting what they think will sell. They need to be less concerned with what’s current and instead paint what makes them happy and what they are passionate about. He spoke about a show they had at the gallery that was called ‘Passion’ where they asked the artists in advance to paint what they were passionate about and that it was a very interesting show. He said that artists shouldn’t be gauging what is selling and instead pursue the subject matter that they have a feeling about.

Larry said to be involved as a gallery owner you need to be a little child-like, and excited about what is new. He enjoys the excitement of seeing the artists’ new work and moving the

art around in the gallery to create new exhibitions and new relationships between the paintings. He said there was a survey in the 80's that concluded that 92% of the population had not been in any gallery. The Peninsula Gallery has always tried to make the gallery experience less intimidating and that their layout provides privacy for the viewer to wander around without having someone peer over their shoulder. He mentioned that some people come in for an 'art fix' and not necessarily to buy. He commented that what they sell does not get worn out by people enjoying it and that they are happy to promote people coming in and enjoying the art experience.

It was recommended that artists consider why they want to be in a gallery. It is nice for artists to have a solo show but the chance of this happening is limited. Larry mentioned that having a show is not necessarily the quickest way to gain recognition. He noted that some artists follow a route of having their work at venues like the ferries or local markets and local juried shows but that in these cases you need a certain personality because you are doing your own promotion. To gain visibility in this manner you have to be prepared to spend time away from your painting to do the marketing of your work. He recommended that if you are going this route that you take advantage of journalists and send them stories about yourself and also send them digital images (jpegs) and that if the article is ready to go they may just run it. Larry said that it may also be beneficial if you include images that work well in black and white and stories that are written in the third person. Larry says that he and Gillian visit places like Goward House and that these are good places for artists to gain experience. He suggests creating your own promotional pieces or stories that go with the paintings and that these stories are sometimes helpful in selling a painting because the audience is interested in finding out what motivated the artist.

An artist's work can also be affected by what it is hanging next to, and that this is something to consider when approaching a gallery. How will your paintings work with the other paintings in the gallery? It does not need to be the same genre or the same price range but think about what your work will look like alongside the others. Another thing to consider is that certain venues may work better for different types of art. Larry provided an example of this by saying that their gallery is not the best for displaying First Nations art because it has a lot of light and that this type of work tends to work well in a darker environment. The artist needs to consider what type of work is already being carried by the gallery and do some research to get an understanding of each particular gallery they may be interested in approaching. Larry said it is important to also consider if you can produce enough to meet the demand of the gallery.

Larry spoke about presentation and mentioned that they prefer to do the framing of the work of their artists. He said it is their commitment to the work, and that artists have so much emotion tied up in the painting but don't necessarily have that same energy to put into the frame. He feels that if someone approaches it with detachment then they can put their time and talent into finishing it by creating a beautiful frame. If the artist presents the work itself then someone else might be able to frame it more objectively.

When speaking of your introduction to the gallery, Larry said it is important how you treat the staff at the gallery. He said that the staff need to believe in the art and believe in the artist, and that this relationship is very important. The gallery owners and staff need to understand you to be able to sell your work well.

It is important to remember that you are selling yourself as well as your work. People are in awe of you and you need to hear that sometimes, as it enhances the process. If you sell art out of your studio you have the advantage of the romance of the experience because the customer enjoys meeting the artist. Larry spoke about how Gillian (his partner and wife) sends a personal note with every cheque and that some artists treasure them because Gillian writes stories about the customer and their experience with the painting that has sold. The artists appreciate this close relationship with the gallery and enjoy hearing about how their painting has brought happiness to someone.

Larry brought along some sample portfolios to show a variety of ways to introduce yourself to a gallery. Some were more elaborate than others but Larry said that they could be fairly simple. He said he preferred the images to be at the front and the biography at the back. He mentioned that he does receive portfolios by email but that he hesitates to open any digital files from someone he does not know. He suggests that if you are going this route that you send an email first noting that you will be sending a subsequent email containing photographs so that the gallery owner is aware of what he/she is opening. He said he is not as keen on dvd's and prefers a portfolio that he can hold in his hands and peruse rather than sitting at his computer. He said they do not have to be complicated and that they should show your current work, representing the kind of paintings that you will be producing for the gallery.

Think outside the box when submitting your portfolio. Larry had everyone laughing when he mentioned that he likes to be the one to open the new delivery of printer cartridges since he discovered the little chocolate hidden inside. He said chocolates aren't necessary with your portfolio, but that thinking of something a little different that creates a nice surprise or a fresh idea is always good. He said to keep in mind that the gallery owners are not the enemy and that they are on your side and that you all share the love of art. He said to consider timing and not to approach a gallery owner during an opening. He said to call ahead to enquire about a good viewing time and even then be prepared to wait or to step aside if there is a customer that requires the attention of the gallery owner or staff. Larry suggested that artists don't do all the talking, and that they provide the portfolio and then give the staff time to peruse it and talk to each other about your work. He spoke about the gallery's experience with photography, and that even he is surprised by what he might be interested in. Larry said that he does not know what he is looking for until he sees it, and that it is always exciting to look at new work.

Artists should bear in mind that they are in an understanding space, and that gallery owners are in the same part of the galaxy that you are. Larry said they may let you know your work is not suitable for their gallery but that it shouldn't be an unpleasant experience and that

you may just have work that doesn't fit their gallery. It needs to be the right venue at the right time.

Larry spoke about how artists create 'cream' and 'milk' paintings, and explained that if the artist also sold from their studio while at a gallery then the 'cream' paintings may be the ones they sell and then they would only have the 'milk' ones left for the gallery. He said the gallery needs to have both because they work well together on the wall and this encourages sales of both types of work. He also mentioned not being discouraged if you don't see your work up when you arrive at a gallery because they are continually changing around their displays. He indicated that they need to be continually rotated to show them at their full advantage and that sometimes placing one painting next to another brings out something unique about that painting and encourages a sale.

Larry said they prefer artists to come to them with a suggestion of a price for their work and then they will go up or down from there. If a piece is priced too low, it may not sell. However, once you raise a price it is almost impossible to lower it. Larry cautioned that prices be raised slowly so as not to cause a problem if the market changes. He also indicated that prices need to be consistent from gallery to gallery. He said that price negotiation with customers sometimes happens but it is generally not more than 10%. He said that he does not like to approach the artist with a low price and would likely say no to that type of offer, as it is not fair to the artist. He talked about how the relationship needs to work in both directions, and that if an artist intends to produce prints from a painting that the gallery is carrying, for example, then that would be very important information for the gallery to have for the potential buyer of that painting. He stressed that the gallery relationship is an important one and that it involves both parties communicating with each other well, and that artists should strive for a long term relationship with their galleries. Continue to nurture this relationship by discussing your future plans and keep the lines of communication open.

Several resources were discussed that could be useful to artists. Larry indicated that International Artists Magazine was a good source of reading. Also mentioned was a book by Richard Schmid entitled Alla Prima. Larry also noted that there is a gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona called Xanadu that has excellent resources and podcasts on various topics such as packing, shipping, websites and approaching galleries. Their website is www.xanadugallery.com.

Sharlene thanked Larry Hanlon for a very informative and enjoyable discussion.