

BEAVERBROOK ART GALLERY BILLS NEW SPACE AS “COMMUNITY'S LIVING ROOM”

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All visitors will enter the newly renovated Beaverbrook Art Gallery through the Harrison McCain Pavilion. The space is free and open to the public. (Jon Collicott/CBC)

After three years of construction, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery unveils the brand-new Harrison McCain Pavilion on Saturday.

Tom Smart, director and CEO of the gallery in Fredericton, says with seven-metre-high ceilings and walls of windows, the new space has transformed the building and Queen Street.

"The space itself is like a little oasis. Out of the hubbub and hurly-burly of the city so when you step in, I really feel like I'm in another world and it's quite a nice world, a contemplative world."

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The new space is being billed as Fredericton's living room and is a space where people can go and be surrounded by art. (Jon Collicott/CBC)

All visitors will enter through the pavilion, which is part of the new, fully accessible entrance to the Beaverbrook Art Gallery.

Smart hopes the theme of accessibility runs through all of the renovations that have been completed. He said that was the chief goal in designing the new space, named for the late Florenceville-Bristol businessman and co-founder of McCain Foods, Harrison McCain.

"It's meant to be a community space," he said. "Mr. McCain wanted people to come into an art gallery and feel comfortable, so that's the vibe that we wanted to create."

The pavilion will be free and open to the public. Smart said the idea is that people can come in and "just relax."

"There's a lot of art that we've installed in the space. There's a café, there's the fireplace ... it's really what we're calling the community's living room."

Choosing the art that will greet visitors has been the job of John Leroux, manager of collections and exhibitions.

"You're going to have things like old dark metal, colourful ceramics, painted wood, a whole bunch of different mediums," Leroux said earlier in the week as crews worked around him, painting and unpacking. "It's going to be great."



John Leroux, manager of collections and exhibitions at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, has chosen this piece by Maritime artist Cal Lane for the new Harrison McCain Pavilion. (Jeanne Armstrong/CBC)

Holding a large piece of metal sculpture, Leroux said three works by Maritime artist Cal Lane will hang high up in the space.

"It's the hood of an old car," he said. "She takes a welding torch and then cuts things like oil drums, huge pieces of sheet steel and metal, and in this case, salvaged car hoods, and then makes these beautiful, really fine lacy patterns."

Leroux is looking forward to the "gorgeous shadow patterns" the sculptures will cast in the space.

The space has too much light to allow the exhibition of photographs or works on paper, but Leroux said there will be several sculptures, including two stone works by Acadian artist Marie H el ene Allain, and a black limestone piece called The Chanter by Indigenous artist Ned Bear.

"Heavy as hell," Leroux said, laughing, as he described the piece by Bear, who was a friend.

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"It's of this face...this old figure with the wrinkles of time. But Ned actually said at one time that was the favourite thing he ever made. So it's one of Ned's favourite sculptures."

Leroux has also chosen two life-size sculptures of a man and a woman leaning in toward each other, by British artist Lynn Chadwick. He says they're perfect for the space because they feel "playful and welcoming."

"What's great about them is people can actually sit on them," Leroux said. "Kids oftentimes will sit on them and get their pictures taken."

Like Smart, he hopes the new space, which also includes upholstered furniture, will be somewhere for people to be comfortable.

"So you want a place where people can just be. And be surrounded by art. And you kind of create it as Fredericton's great living room."

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