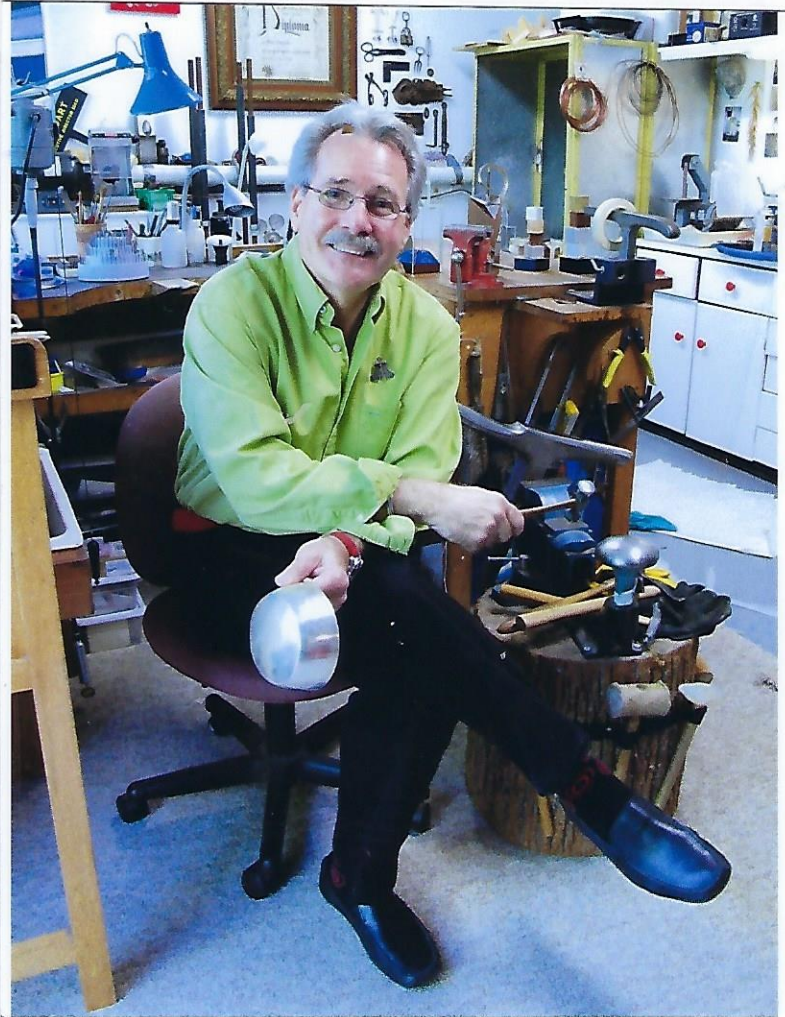


Artist celebrates 50 years with retrospective



By Susan Doolan, Special to Postmedia Network
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Donald Stuart marks 50 years of creative excellence with a retrospective show at the Simcoe County Museum. SUSAN DOOLAN/SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

Donald (Don) Stuart marks 50 years of creative excellence with a retrospective show at the Simcoe County Museum. It will include a variety of work -- 174 pieces in all -- ranging from commission work for individuals and corporations, a mix of jewelry and holloware (anything that isn't jewelry) and *Homage*, a 40-piece collection of necklaces inspired by Canadian women.

"I borrowed back quite a number of pieces from individuals and from the Canadian Museum of History," said Stuart, adding the museum had eight or nine pieces ranging from a coffee service to bowls made from silver and other materials that at one time were part of other collections before being given to the museum.

The retrospective also includes two new pieces: a necklace and a rose bowl. The necklace, which is part of *Homage*, was inspired by Judy Gingell, an executive elder of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and multi-award winner, including the Order of Canada in 2009 and Jubilee Medal in 2012, for her life-long contributions to Aboriginal rights and governance in the Yukon and public service.

The sterling silver necklace celebrates her First Nations' heritage as well as her strong ties to the Yukon through the use of traditional materials which run the gamut from gold nuggets to moose hair. She was born on her grandparents' trapline at Moose Lake, south of Whitehorse, and continues to live in the Yukon, in Whitehorse.

Each of the necklaces in the collection has symbolism that reflects the accomplishments of the women who inspired it. Many are well known -- Elizabeth Arden's name is synonymous with an American cosmetic company yet she was born a Canadian. Others are less famous. Olivia Poole, for example, invented the jolly jumper.

Stuart made Gingell's necklace, the first Yukon representation in *Homage*, for a show at the Yukon Art Centre Public Art Gallery in Whitehorse, which ended May 27 and now joins the retrospective exhibition at the Simcoe County Museum.

"I also made another rose bowl this year," said Stuart, adding that it celebrates Canada's 150th anniversary and was inspired by the new logo. "(It has) materials from every province in the country - BC jade to labradorite - magical stones that look like butterfly wings -- plus an Ontario diamond, caribou antler -- and more."

Over the years, Stuart, an award-winning Canada designer, has carved out a niche of custom one-of-a-kind works and many of these pieces can be seen in the show. They range from wedding rings to a birthday gift, corporate commissions such as the annual June Callwood Award which this year, went to a Barrie organization, Camphill Communities, and is currently on display in the downtown Camphill store.

It also includes exhibition pieces from invitations, and design competitions such as diamond competition. One of his commissions, a set of cufflinks, won best pearl design of the year in 2014. It was one of many instances where a meeting with a client to create a special piece sent him a new direction.

"The MacLaren door - that is still a favourite of mine," he said of a commission by Joan and Bob Lehman for the Barrie gallery. "I find it (commission work) fun, exciting, challenging and rewarding -- I'm often taken in direction I never would have thought of. I love that interaction with people -- it makes life exciting and interesting."

One of the most significant commissions for Stuart was creating the inaugural Glenn Gould Prize, which that year, in 1987, went to Canadian composer Murray Schafer. A photo of it has been included on the show card and exhibition brochure which was published by the museum.

Commissions were his main focus even when he was teaching full time at Georgian College. He kept up his own work, in part because he felt it made him a better teacher.

In 1972, Stuart accepted a position at Georgian College to teach design, woodshop and start a weaving program in Barrie. It was his idea to add an elective in jewelry and, under his guidance, in 1989, it became a three-year program, the first of its kind to incorporate paid co-ops for its students.

Even though he was making a name for himself in tapestry, he was losing his passion for the medium and became more fascinated with metal. So, he took a sabbatical from Georgian to go back to school in Rochester, N.Y. for a fine arts degree in metal, crafts, and holloware. He took early retirement from teaching in 2001 to focus on exhibitions and commissions.

Stuart grew up in Toronto and graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1967 where he majored in metal and textiles with a minor in wood. Shortly afterward he traveled to Baffin Island to help Inuit women in Pangnirtung set up a handweaving studio. It is one of the largest handweaving studios in Canada and he continues to keep in touch. It is also where he met his wife Jill. The couple have two grown children and two grandchildren.

The retrospective exhibition is on display at the Simcoe County Museum, 1151 Highway 26, just outside of Barrie until Sept. 4.