

An artistic and curatorial luminary in our midst

Allan's Artists



Allan O'Marra

Oshawa artist Olexander Wlasenko recalls the moment when, as a fourth-year alternative studies OCADU student in Italy, he observed first-hand a later work by the great master, Titian, in which he painted more with his hands than his brushes.

"It was like a bullet to my mind," the curator of Station Gallery in Whitby enthuses (the way the great one worked with more direct contact between himself and his paintings).

And, with this epiphany lingering, Wlasenko eventually gravitated to producing large-format drawings, using his fingers and powdered charcoal to create award-winning works of art that have become a staple expression of his illustrious career.

Wlasenko is a native of 'The Shwa', son of ex-pat Ukrainians and a product of excellent schooling in that city -- typified by the decision of his high school art teacher to give him free rein in art class because of his obvious talent. And then he moved on to OCADU and Italy. It was during his studies in Florence that he stumbled across reels of vintage black-and-white films in an abandoned theatre -- stills from the films which became reference for many of his later professional works. He describes these images as "shards in time, submerged in a closed narrative," which he extracted and elevated to works of fine art.



DURHAM -- Artist/curator Olexander Wlasenko works on one of his charcoal powder drawings in his Oshawa studio.

PHOTO BY ALLAN O'MARRA

His ongoing fascination with black-and-white cinematic iconography can be traced back to his father's collection of Soviet post-war films targeting the Eastern Bloc Diaspora that, when he saw projected, provided Wlasenko with magical moments of contact with flickering cinematography that became seminally implanted in his artistic psyche.

After OCADU, Wlasenko moved on to obtain a BA from Guelph university and then earned a MFA from Western, graduating in 2000. Returning to Oshawa, he was soon hired as an assistant curator at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery and in 2008 was hired as full curator at Station Gallery. At the Whitby gallery, he is responsible

for not only a prodigious slate of exhibitions by professional artists from the region and beyond, but numerous programs that engage the community in artistic expression and awareness activities.

About being an artist and a curator here in Durham Region, Wlasenko says, "I'm the luckiest person in the world." Check out Wlasenko's amazing record of activities and achievements at www.olexander.ca.

Allan O'Marra is a professional artist living and working in Ajax. For contact information go to www.allanomarra.com.