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Saskatoon art installation chronicles the plague years

"In this particular version of the pandemic, everyone's tired."

Nick Pearce

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Two artists Betsy Rosenwald and Dawna Rose have taken up a residency in the Art Placement to house their ongoing project Journal of the Pandemic Years. Photo taken in Saskatoon, Sask. on Monday, February 14, 2022. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BERG /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

The last two years would never fit in the pages of a journal, much less on a canvas.

Artists Betsy Rosenwald and Dawna Rose instead chose a wall to chronicle the pandemic, constantly updating the mural with panoptic visuals ranging from satire to nature scenes.

Their shared project, Journal of the Plague Years, has spent February housed in downtown Saskatoon's The Gallery/Art Placement, evolving with each day as the artists prepare for an open house on Saturday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

They plan to sell off square feet of the mural during the week of Feb. 28 and donate the proceeds to Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation.

The work's tone, however, will be different this time.

"In this particular version of the pandemic, everyone's tired. Nobody wants to say anything about it. And there's conflict. ... It is going to affect the work, because we're part of it," Rose said.

The artists have worked on the piece for much of the past two years, with variations appearing wherever studio space presented itself.

They've been evicted from two studio spaces to make way for real estate development. The lack of a long-term space has sent them as far as a residency in Newfoundland to continue their artwork, Rosenwald said.

Previous iterations of the journal were on cardboard so the artists could pack them up and send the pieces anywhere as an exhibition in a box.

The current version takes up the better part of a wall, with sprawling paintings of birds, bugs and painted-over protest signs mingled with small jokes.

It's also partly a response to the convoy protests, which prompted Rose to paint over cardboard protest signs that used to dot the visuals and place more emphasis on scenes from nature.



Two artists, Betsy Rosenwald and Dawna Rose, have taken up a residency at Art Placement to house their ongoing project, Journal of the Pandemic Years. PHOTO BY MICHELLE BERG /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

“I ended up taking a lot of my signs and burying them,” Rose said. “And then I just decided because it’s winter and it’s been a long, terrible time that I would bring nature into it.

This version of the journal has been about the anti-sign.”

While the work included a satirical depiction of Premier Scott Moe, Rosenwald said overt messages like it will be likely filtered out over time.

The new version of the journal seeks to empathize with a viewer’s exhaustion.

“It’s a time when if you want to reach people, you really have to think about how you would feel viewing this. What (does) this time mean and how will you convey that?” Rosenwald said.

Levi Nicholat, co-owner of the The Gallery/Art Placement, said it’s fitting that the wall draws on those circumstances, including everything from environmental issues to affordability challenges for artists.

“I don’t think they’re trying to cut through the noise. I think they’re just trying to reflect that situation. It’s noisy.”

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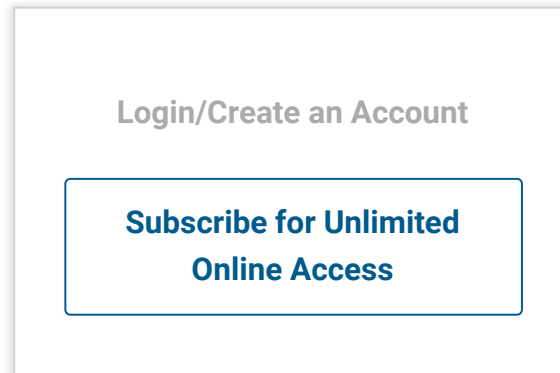


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