



BATTLE OF THE PAINTBRUSHES

As I enter the setting of the art battle that happened the night before, fresh-faced for my next-day interview with event producer Angela Hillier, The Victoria Event Centre is no longer full of buzzing spectators. The room is now empty, the bright lights are dim, the tables and chairs all neatly arranged, and the floors clear of painting debris. It's a drastic change from the night before, where I was a spectator among 220 other people who all gathered to watch different artists both aspiring and seasoned paint in an epic live battle.

The concept: Live competitive painting with three rounds, each round lasting 20 minutes. Six different artists gather per round. The final winner moves on with 15 other winners from other art battles throughout the year, and competes at the Victoria City finals. There are cash prizes and a title. Across Canada city finalists move onto the National Competition. At each step the audience votes on their favorites.

At the start of each round, each painter is given a blank canvas, several daubs of color and some brushes. Seconds count down, the audience is gabbing loudly, and I'm poised at the ready, until the enthusiastic MC announces 'it's go time!' And then the madness begins. Audience members crowd around and revolve around the circle of painters while they furiously or meticulously drop paint onto a blank surface. Some of the artists are nervous at first, but then they zone in, and

tune everything else out. Packed together like sardines, the audience is 'oohing and awing' and commenting to their friends, while they hold a cold glass of cider, beer or wine in their hands. Another crew member takes professional photographs as the event unfolds- he is right up front, then moves onto a ledge, then stands on the bar for a better angle, clicking away.

Leah Patterson is in round one. Blonde strands of hair loosely swept behind her head. Her first painting is of an old automobile parked on an empty street in the middle of tall skyscraper buildings. Her choice of perspective (the street narrowing at the top) is clever as it tricks the eye into seeing distances, far off.

Across from her is Michael Munday, a recent graduate of the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. He shows off his training in a flash as he piles on the thick paint strokes with his fingers, ending up with a dreamy landscape of aqua blue and turquoise and green mountains and a lake against a sky.

Veteran artist Malcolm McCallum paints a taupe brown nude figure of a woman with white lines. Starting out with a completely blank canvas, his first move is to cover the canvas with gold paint. Then add the layers.

It is an interesting change, to observe these artists' process, to see their creations come to life from start to finish. As Angela points out, for the audience, it's a different experience than buying a painting from a gallery and potentially never meeting the artist it came from.

All the paintings are for sale through a silent auction onstage after each round.

People can bid, starting at a minimum suggested amount of \$50, an affordable offering. Although some painters draw in higher bids. Tied with Leah Patterson for the final winner spot Thursday night, Hovey Eyres', painting in round two sold for \$250, and the highest Angela has seen someone bid on a painting is \$800 at an event in Vancouver. However, the average bid is usually around \$70-\$80 dollars.

"What I really like about art battle - I'm an abstract painter myself-- I think it's really unfortunate how people view painting on a pedestal. There's an automatic respect for paintings, which can be good but also you never touch a painting. You don't take photos of them. It's this precious object...art battle makes the process accessible."

Then there is the wild card in round two. The wild card is a randomly picked audience member who gets to join the artists and paint something. Angela loves the idea of the wild card, because it makes live painting really accessible and interactive for the audience. As she explains, you don't have to be an artist at all to simply have fun painting on the fly whatever inspires you.

"A lot of people really love it, because it's unplanned, it's unpredictable. It could be anyone. We always like to have that spot open. It's always interesting to see what they do...I've had people who have been the wild card before, come back and officially paint."

At the interview desk, I notice that Angela and I are wearing matching black and white polka dot dresses. (I must be

channeling my inner artist!) She tells me how Art Battle Canada first began seven years ago by two artists, Chris and Simon, who had the vision in Toronto, and since then it has grown to dozens of cities across Canada.

In Victoria, art battles take place on the second Thursday of each month. The next two art battles take place on February 11, and March 10 at the VEC. For more details visit artbattle.ca or visit them on Facebook.

EVENTS CALENDAR

1) Theatre Inconnu

Theatre Inconnu presents: The New York smash hit *BAD JEWS* by Joshua Harmon. Feb 16 - Mar 5
"The best comedy of the season." (2013) New York Times
Info: <http://www.theatreinconnu.com>

2) Kaleidoscope Theatre presents *Robinson & Crusoe*

Two unlucky soldiers from opposing sides find themselves stranded on a roof of a house adrift on the sea. Together they must overcome their heightened suspicions if they are to make it out of this ordeal alive. Can they work together to survive?

Metro Studio February 26- March 6. Tickets available at McPherson box office. <http://kaleidoscope.bc.ca/>

3) Langham Court Theatre- *Female Transport*

Six women convicted of petty crimes endure a six-month voyage from 19th Century England to a penal colony in what we now know as Australia.
March 2, 2016 to March 19, 2016 - Tickets \$15 to \$21 - Langhamtheatre.ca - 250-384-2142

4) Flavour of Chocolate Culinary Competition

April 23rd at The Westin, Bear Mountain. Vote for your favorite chef! Six chefs compete and serve up delicious savory plates incorporating an element of chocolate, paired with a complimentary beverage. Entertainment, silent auction and more.

www.flavourofchocolate.com Soroptimist Westshore. Contact Deb Alcadinho or Joan Jackson for more information. flvrofchocolate@gmail.com

5) FILMS & FUN EVENTS: THE VIC THEATRE DOWNTOWN

Indulge in fresh popcorn, hot movies (daily!), wine and local beer at Victoria's only independent (and licensed!) cinema, or rent The Vic for your own event! Embrace the unexpected at The Vic Theatre at 808 Douglas Street. www.thevic.ca

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LANGHAM COURT THEATRE

MAR 2 - 19, 2016

FEMALE TRANSPORT

HISTORICAL DRAMA BY STEVE GOOCH
DIRECTED BY M. BJORNSON
a story of survival & solidarity at sea

2 FOR \$20 WED MAR 2

2 FOR \$30 MAR 8 & 15

250.384.2142 langhamtheatre.ca

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