

Inspiration for artists comes from many different sources. Inspiration can be emotional, physical or spiritual. When all three come together the result is likely dramatic and, for the artists at least, life changing.

That place where artists' go for creative ideas is often their response to life. It can be playful and pretty or dark and brooding. At times it transcends explanation.

When Beverly Petow lost a life-long friend her grief welled up inside and came bursting forth in a series of metal sculptures. Through the death of her friend she gave birth. Her sorrow was the catalyst that set her on a journey of creation that hasn't yet ended.

Petow was devastated by her loss and in an effort to get over her grief she went out into the studio. She said it was as though she was being led.

"That's where the dress came from," she said. "We used to sew together, ever since we were 12. We made everything from blue jeans to business suits."

Last year at the Sooke Fine Arts Show, Petow entered her homage to Kathryn. "When we were young girls we made our clothes from scratch" was a steel sculpture of a dress. The dress symbolized many things for Petow and it was made while the tears still flowed for Kathryn and it was made from her heart.

"It was such a gift from Kathryn," she said.

That tribute resulted in a new visibility for the East Sooke artist. Douglas Udell, one of the jurors for the Sooke Fine Arts Show, saw merit in her work and the work of Victoria artist Iris Nardini and took them into the stable of artists he represents in his galleries. Udell has galleries in Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver.

Petow says that getting picked up by a gallery like Doug's is, "a chance in a lifetime experience."

Such are the possibilities when one shows at a prestigious show like the Sooke Fine Arts Show, and the reason for jurors. Bev Petow won the Best 3 Dimensional award at the 2009 show and Iris Nardini won juror Douglas Udell's juror's choice award.

"It is national and international exposure you can only dream of," said Petow. It is also a huge validation of her art and being an artist. She said previously she wasn't taking herself seriously.

"You kind of keep pinching yourself, it was the process of coming to grips with what this opportunity was about."

Her dress series obviously strikes a chord with art aficionados as the pieces are selling very well.

Iris Nardini entered the SFAS for the first time last year and walked away with not only the juror's choice (Douglas Udell) award but he also purchased the work entitled "Serious Effort."

"The show got me this break," said Nardini. "My reaction was pretty exciting, kind of like being discovered at Schwabs."

Nardini is a sculptor with a passion for the human figure. She began her artistic journey as a landscape painter but when she took a sculpting class she was hooked. She is entering a piece this year and she said that one of the important issues with these shows is to have jurors who have "something to bring to the table" in regard to their knowledge and expertise.

"You need the right kind of exposure, there's a lot of good artists in any field, it's all about timing," said Nardini.

A new resurgence of appreciation for handmade works is happening and people are wanting to have something that is not mass produced overseas. They want unique, one-of-a-kind pieces. The Sooke Fine Arts Show offers artists the opportunity to have their work viewed by the thousands of people who come through the 10-day show.

The Sooke Fine Arts Show is volunteer-based and they are looking for new volunteers to help in a number of areas. Go to www.sookefinearts.com or call the show office at 250-642-7256.