



KATHY PLONKA / THE COURIER-NEWS

Bubotto art salon director Dawn Blais is draped by some of featured artist Bert Leveille's wall-sized tapestries. The tapestries will be shown at next Sunday's event at Facaccia's Restaurant in downtown Elgin.

Artistic support

Elgin's Bubotto arts salon has become a place to learn and grow

By Kathaleen Roberts

STAFF WRITER

A Soviet artist once smuggled 20 paintings to Elgin's Bubotto art salon by tucking multiple canvases between a pair of frames.

The collapse of Communism may make such a clandestine approach to art exhibition obsolete. But Bubotto's appeal to a galaxy of visual and performing artistic styles endures. Now in its third year, this season's first show is drawing between 50 and 75 artists from throughout the Fox Valley and the world, said Dawn Blais, director and co-founder of the bimonthly artistic showcase.

Organizers expect Sunday's (March 26) exhibit to lure 300 to 500

visitors to Facaccia's Restaurant at 50 N. Spring St. The salon will be open 1-10 p.m.

A gathering place for artists and art lovers to view new works, Bubotto eschews juries and contests in favor of a more supportive approach to exhibition. Blais estimates the event generates sales for only about 1 to 5 percent of the artists.

"It's not the idea to sell the art," she said. "It's to gather in the community and exchange ideas and techniques. We have demonstration artists so people can come in and learn a technique."

Three years ago, Blais and co-founder Jonathan Cohon wove to-

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Artist

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gether the names of their dogs "Bubba" and "Otto" to form the salon's quirky name. Overwhelmed by the work Bubotto entailed, Cohon left after the first show. Blais has voiced similar thoughts as the incessant phone calls, mailings and installations mount in a string of sleepless nights. She also works full time as a waitress and portrait painter.

"I have to do it," she maintains, "because there are not enough people who support artists. Communities are judged by the way they treat their artists. We've got to show the rest of the world that we're free-thinking."

The inaugural show features harpist Wendy Paul Muston performing both classical and pop selections, arrowhead sculptor Don Quillman and Lakota loom bead worker Standing Bear Woman. A lineup of five poets will read 3-5 p.m. before turning the stage over to an open mike night. Past shows have included live jazz and belly dancers, as well as jewelry and fur-

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niture.

"We've had plays. We've had dancers from Chicago," Blais explained. "That's another form of art. We want to give exposure to all the arts."

The wall-sized canvases of Elgin

painter Bert Leveille dominate Sunday's show with up to 24 by 15 feet of surrealist color splashes. Bubotto's featured artist, Leveille paints her pieces in sections rolled out on the floor. Sometimes she doesn't see the complete composition until the installation unveiling.

"It's a journey through my subconscious," she said of her sweeping style. "Some people find (the paintings) very nightmarish, and some people find them very fanciful."

Blais expects to lure as many as 100 artists as the school year ends and teachers return to their studios. Each artist brings two pieces to the salon.

"I'm going to be just as surprised as you," Blais said of Sunday's lineup. "I just love to watch it walk in the door. Since we're not judging them, they bring whatever they want and it really gets wild."

Bubotto is free and open to the public. Elgin painter David Jensen will sign pen-and-ink prints for a donation to the salon. The season's second Bubotto is scheduled for May 7.