



Explorations From My Mind's Eye

Mike Ondrovcik

April 17 - June 1, 2019

Opening Reception: Thursday, April 18, 2019 at 7PM

Workshop: Thursday, May 9, 6-8PM



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"I put my heart and my soul into my work, and have lost my mind in the process." - Vincent van Gogh

Access to cultural imagery is expanding at an exponential rate. Uploaded images are shared in seconds and can circulate around the world in a matter of hours. Some ideas are outdated by the time they hit the mainstream media. So many things are disposable.

It is refreshing then, that *Explorations From My Mind's Eye*, an exhibition of new work by artist Michael Karel Ondrovcik, has solid roots in an old genre. The broader category of Folk Art, within which he practices, has stood the test of time and continues to remain relevant, much to the delight of curators and art collectors.

Although Mike said that this exhibition is about "giving life and substance to the many spirits, imps, demons, faeries and other fanciful creatures swimming and out of my imaginings", it actually goes much deeper. In a way, this exhibition began hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

"My grandfather told me that as a boy in the late 1800's and early 1900's, that he saw creatures in the swamps. When he was growing up, the whole area between Blenheim and Erieau including the lake was a dense jungle, swamp and bog, just like Rondeau Park still is today," Mike said. In his later years, Sherman Burk became a celebrated folk artist, known for his wood carvings of mysterious swamp creatures. This display of sculptural works gathered from natural and re-furbished materials have deep roots in the

collective creative unconscious of his grandfather and the Old World folk artists who came before him.

In their book, *A Compendium of Canadian Folk Art* (1985), authors Terry Kobayashi and Michael Bird write: "On the one hand, folk art is defined as the collective manifestation of an ethnically-based decorative tradition. On the other hand, folk art comes to be seen rather as the product of the individual mind, the artistic outpouring of an untrained painter, sculptor or other practitioner."¹

Each sculpture in *Explorations From My Mind's Eye* seems to capture a frozen moment, not unlike a paparazzi snapshot taken to expose a secret outing. The artist explains that "the Nordic, Celtic, and Old World spirits live alongside, but are hidden from, the new world angels and demonic spirits. But they are not any less relevant." The way in which he echoes these ancient archetypes, often through primitive manipulation of natural materials, is also part of the Folk Art tradition.

At the same time, Mike is a product of the Space Age. His artwork reflects his struggle to be heard and understood in this noisy, image-saturated world. This is especially evident in his bold use of colour and choice of metallic paint as a primary medium.

One hundred years from now, artists will draw upon the collective unconscious of the digital as well as the pre-industrial ages. Whether it is with sticks or metal or space dust, they will continue to manifest, through the lenses of their own cultural experiences, the forms of the elusive and mystical creatures they explore in their mind's eye.

¹Kobayashi, Terry and Michael Bird. *A Compendium of Canadian Folk Artists*. (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1985), p. 8.



Laurie Langford is a thought-provoking assemblage and collage artist based in Chatham, Ontario. Langford inserts subversive humour into her work to prick debate on contemporary gender expectations. She has been a proud member of ARTspace since its inception in 2008.

cover image: *Angel of the In-Between*, mixed media sculpture, 2019
middle image: *Crow Shaman*, mixed media sculpture, 2019
right image: *Traveller*, mixed media sculpture, 2019