

## London artists turn to the Thames



Herman Goodden, writer, and Kirtley Jarvis, mixed media installation artist, are two of the artists involved in the River Project.

This spring a group of local artists invite Londoners to turn towards the Thames River and appreciate its history and beauty through artwork, poetry and stories.

*The River Project* is comprised of 19 London artists who aim to raise awareness of the Thames River, specifically within the boundaries of the City of London. Subtitled *19 London Artists Turn to the Thames*, the project is a collaborative effort of artists using a variety of mediums to celebrate the river that runs through their community.

As artist Kevin Bice says, "In Canada we tend to dismiss our heritage as less important than older cultures. In fact, what interests me with painting is not only the landscape, but a lot of the things of history that are gone."

Bice's painting of the banks of the Thames River, south of Blackfriars Bridge, is an excellent example. Superimposed over the familiar modern riverbank is a ghostly drawing of the old Blackfriars Mill that once dominated the spot.

Mixed media artist Jennifer Robertson has produced a map based on scenes and experiences from her bike rides along the river. Sculptor Ron Milton, has built a racing scull with a dangling fish to show the relationship between man and nature.

An exhibition of the artists' works opens at the McIntosh Gallery at the University of Western Ontario on May 15 and runs to June 22. *The River Project* will travel to Woodstock Gallery November 15 to January 10, 2009.

A related exhibit at The Art Exchange on Wortley Road will run May 5 to May 24, with an opening reception on May 16.

Catherine Elliot Shaw, curator of the McIntosh Gallery, says, "This exhibition is a wonderful opportunity to consider the impact of the Thames River on this community. The artists have documented and commented upon this important waterway which is yet to be fully appreciated from a cultural, historical, economic and social point of view. Curiously, no two artists chose the exact same stretch of river and so have given us a comprehensive portrait of its many faces."

In addition to the art exhibits, a book has been published that features artwork, as well as written submissions. The book is edited by London writer Herman Goodden, and is woven together with an essay of Goodden's on the history of the Thames River. Michael Baker, curator of the Elgin County Museum in St. Thomas, has provided an opening essay.

The idea started several years ago when Bice's wife, Daphne, found a book in the Loire District of France.

Like the Thames River, the Loire River was threatened by pollution and neglect. In 1994 a group of artists united to draw attention to it. Bice was inspired by their project. He thought such a book, in collaboration with an exhibition, would draw attention to the plight of the Thames River. "A certain number of people go to exhibitions, but a book reaches other

populations," Bice says.

While a new experience, Bice found the fundraising exciting. "A lot of organizations truly care," he says. Thanks to generous funding by a number of associations, including the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the group has been able to make 2,600 copies of the book available to several non-profit organizations. The distribution partners will promote and sell the book, keeping the funds raised to further their own local initiatives.

The launch of *The River Project: 19 London Artists Turn to the Thames* book will take place on May 1, 5:30 p.m., at the Forks of the Thames by the flagpole. Afterwards, the artists, distributors, donors and special guests will walk to the Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute where the books will be distributed and refreshments will be served.

*River Project* books will be available through Original Kids Theatre, McIntosh Gallery, McIlwraith Field Naturalists, the London Public Library and a dozen other organizations.

An on-line, low resolution version of the book and information about the exhibitions can be viewed at [www.londonartists.ca](http://www.londonartists.ca).

Since the launch of the project two years ago, Bice says the enthusiasm has expanded into other groups. Carolyn Doyle, librarian at the Landon Branch, embraced the *River Project* as an exciting idea and the library has set up displays of artwork and hosted a number of events and talks. For information visit [www.londonpubliclibrary.ca](http://www.londonpubliclibrary.ca).

Bice finds this very satisfying because it has spread the effect around. He says, "Somehow at the right time we managed to touch a place in people. It is tremendously rewarding, exactly what we wanted."

For additional information see the Arts Calendar.

*Maridon Duncanson is a London freelance writer with a passion for art, theatre and music. She also likes cats.*

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Friday, May 30  
and Saturday, May 31

**Time:**  
8:00pm, both nights

**Where:**  
The Arts Project  
(203 Dundas Street)

**Tickets: \$20.00**  
order on-line at  
[www.londonfringe.ca](http://www.londonfringe.ca)  
or call 519-434-0606