

## Rumours of Bees

*Paintings by Tricia Sellmer, Poems by Alexander Forbes. An outstanding new poetic talent teams up with one of Canada's most celebrated painters to pay harmonious tribute to those remarkable denizens of the hive, purveyors to the breakfast table and all-around buzzing wonders: The Bees. The result, elegantly bound and beautifully type-set and printed on top-quality archival paper by Abacus Press, makes a charming and thought-provoking dialog between the visual and poetic arts. An unusual gift and an elegant addition to the home library or the parlor coffee table.*  
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## **REVIEW from Art Times**

*Jan./Feb., 2005*  
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## REVIEW from Kamloops Daily News

*"MUSEUM LINKS NATURAL SCIENCE WITH COLLABORATIVE BEE PROJECT, BOOK LAUNCH AND READINGS "*

*By Mike Youds, Kamloops Daily News Entertainment Reporter.  
Friday, Oct. 31, 2003.*

*By Courtesy of the Daily News.*

A rare synthesis of art, poetry, artifacts and natural history-an industrious hive of creativity-awaits visitors to the Kamloops Museum.

"Rumours of Bees" is a new exhibition inspired by and centred around a newly published book of the same name by visual artist Tricia Sellmer and poet Alexander Forbes, a UCC instructor.

The exhibition, which continues through November, adds to the meaning of what was already an unusual collaboration.

"One night, in the middle of the night, I woke up and thought, 'Oh, the bee project,'" Sellmer explains.

The painter's work, hung in gallery exhibitions and collections across North America, has long focused on the beauty and

symbolism of the garden, so the bee is a natural extension.

"I use the garden for various reasons. I see it as a source for feminine power. It represents the beginning of life. It started in the garden and with the bees, really. Without bees, we wouldn't have gardens."

Forbes, who had earlier worked with Sellmer on "The River Series," a Cunliffe Gallery exhibition of painting and verse, was equally intrigued by the bee idea. So began a more ambitious, three-year collaboration culminating in the publication of *Rumours of Bees* (Red Heifer Press).

"We looked at bees from different angles, through the seasons, what they mean to people, stories and speculation about bees, how they might see the world," Forbes says.

His verse draws upon science, literature, music and observations about bees, with references, for example, to the poetry of Emily Dickinson and "Flight of the Bumblebee" by Rimsky-Korsakov.

"For the longest time we just called it the bee project because it didn't have a purpose," he adds.

They found a purpose, or more precisely a joint expression for the work, through a publisher in Beverly Hills, California. Peter Gimpel, a poet as well, operates Red Heifer Press, an art specialty publishing house.

"He was very, very supportive of the idea," Forbes says.

Photographer Paul Clarke, formerly of Kamloops, captured Sellmer's work in all its vivid detail and colour for illustration in the book.

On Saturday Gimpel will gather with his local clients at the Kamloops Museum at 7:30 PM for the launch of Rumours of Bees, the book.

On Sunday at 2 PM, Merlin Books hosts a broader celebration, a poetry reading in which Forbes will read from Rumours of Bees, Gimpel will read from his work, and Mervyn Nicholson, also a UCC instructor, will read from his new book, 13 Ways of Looking at Images: The Logic of Visualization in Literature and Society, also newly published by Red Heifer.

"We thought, why not celebrate this small press which has taken an interest in Canadian writers," Forbes says.

But back to the bees-big bulbous fellows, larger than life, that are buzzing around the museum through the profuse color and energy contained in Seller's work. There are giant bees in mid-flight, bees amassed and at work in the mysterious darkness of a hive, and the world as Sellmer imagines a bee must see it-a dazzling, abstract dance of brilliant color-through those tiny, multi-faceted eyes.

"It's to actually experience the world of the bee, and that's what we've tried to do in many ways," Sellmer says.

"To my knowledge, I do not know of an artist who has done large bees," she notes. "There are some little watercolours and bees are found in Egyptian hieroglyphics."

On the other hand, bees have a long and distinguished presence in literature, as the book's foreword notes. Bee poetry dates back to the ancient Greeks and poets of no less stature than William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Dickinson have written of the virtues of and the symbolism arising from the insect in all its wondrous diversity and purpose.

When Sellmer was discussing the bee project with museum curator Cuyler Page one night, he in turn saw the opportunity to explore the subject through an exhibition. This latter project quite literally took off within a month.

Page likes the idea of drawing together studies that are normally separated in various institutions.

"Why do they always have to be in separate buildings," he asks. "Let's link them together and suddenly we've created a hive of activity."

Page pushed forward a scheduled, pre-Christmas exhibition of miniatures in favour of the novel Bee Project, Part Two.

Tapping into his community resources, he found a variety of scientific exhibits and historical artifacts relating to bees, with help from the local chapter of the British Columbia Honey

Producers Association. These include an old, galvanized honey extractor, honeycombs, various honey products and a specially built observation hive.

"It sort of happened as it came along. I knew I wanted to have artifacts and artwork and natural history, but things just sort of happen in the museum world."

He has installed a couple of microscopes, one called a "scope on a rope" and another an inexpensive children's toy, connecting them to monitor and using special software to look at bees close up, the whole other awe-inspiring world of the microcosm.

"That's why I like using microscopes-to remind us of this world that's down there."

As is often the case with Page's exhibitions, this one is a work in progress. He hopes to be able to build one exhibit that employs a CD recording of Forbes reciting his bee poems, recorded by Henry Small, built into a bee hive.

"This is produced by Kamloops people. That's the reason to celebrate it," he says.