

Entertainment

All you need is love — and a padlock

□ Artist helps people make a connection and commitment to loved ones

By Darlene Polachic
for The Saskatoon Sun

Monique Martin fell in love with padlocks when visiting Florence, Italy, some years ago. There, and in many other places of the world, people attach padlocks to bridges and throw away the key as a symbol of lasting love.

The idea intrigued Martin, an artist and award-winning teacher who instructs Visual Arts at Georges Vanier School. Soon padlocks began appearing in her paintings and prints. She says her body of work continues to build.

"As I see more locks around the world, I'm painting them into my paintings."

Last summer, Martin created Love Locks, an interactive art exhibit featuring padlocks. It was for a special event in Ottawa celebrating the Rideau Canal, which is a UNESCO Heritage Site. Martin spent the summer in Ottawa as artist-in-residence with her Love Locks sculpture which is a free-standing metal heart with a hollow supporting post.

"The idea was for people visiting the installation to make a promise — to one another, or perhaps to make a connection to a trip to Ottawa — and seal the promise by attaching a padlock to the Love Locks sculpture and 'throwing away' the key in the hollow supporting post. In Europe, the padlock is attached to a bridge and the key is tossed in the river.

"People attached locks to the sculpture all summer long. The first were some Chinese dignitaries who were in Ottawa on a tourism link. They connected with Love Locks as representatives of the Great Wall of China, also a UNESCO Heritage Site, and where some think the very first love locks were attached. Their padlocks have red ribbons attached. Attaching ribbons is something they traditionally do in China."

Love Locks is now paying a visit to Saskatoon, and will be the central feature in an exhibit of Monique Martin's artistic work at Rouge Gallery beginning Monday, Feb. 14. The exhibit is entitled Locks of Love.

"We selected the Valentine's Day opening because we want people in Saskatoon to show their love for each other on that day by attaching a padlock," Martin says. "I'm very excited about it all. I think it's a perfect way to do Valentines. Buy a padlock, take your girlfriend to the gallery, attach the padlock, make a promise, and take her out to dinner. I say, 'All you need is love — and a padlock.'"

Martin says it is interesting to note where and how people attach their padlocks.

"Everyone chooses their own location, and because of that, the sculpture changes every day. And you see every kind and colour of padlock imaginable. Many are signed and inscribed with messages."

Just prior to being installed at Rouge Gallery, Love Locks played an interesting role in a first-of-its-kind initiative in Saskatoon — the Singles Love Build for Habitat for Humanity. This was the brainchild of Kathleen Crowther, the resource development co-ordinator for Habitat for Humanity in Saskatoon.

"We organized the Singles Love Build as a light-hearted way to get more young people out," she says. "Especially people looking for love and connection with someone else with a philanthropic outlook, someone who likes to give back to humanity. We scheduled it for Saturday (Feb. 12), the Saturday closest to Valentine's, in hopes of drawing a different group of people to help build a duplex for two working families. It's a chance to give back to the community and meet some new folks in the process."

When Martin heard about the Singles Love Build, she figured Love Locks would be a perfect symbolic accompaniment for the project.

"I like to have my art in non-traditional settings," she observes.

And so, on Feb. 12, not only did singles work on a Habitat for Humanity build, but they could also buy a padlock from the Re-Store for \$5, attach it to the Love Locks sculpture, and throw away the key. The proceeds from the sale of padlocks went to Habitat for Humanity.

There will be padlocks for sale at the Rouge Gallery, as well.



Artist Monique Martin polishes her Locks of Love exhibit which is being shown at the Rouge Gallery beginning Monday, Feb. 14 and continuing until Feb. 25

"Or," Martin says, "people can bring their own padlock for their loved one or their family."

Martin's interactive installation celebrating love will be open to the public from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday. Gallery owner Wanda Underhill invites people to bring their padlocks, meet Monique, and view the exhibit, which includes a variety of Martin's paintings and prints of love locks. The show will be at Rouge Gallery until Feb. 26.

"It's amazing how people have embraced and supported the Love Locks project," Martin says. "Rick Kallman, a local engineer, helped me design the heart. Welding people in Ottawa were extremely helpful and very excited about working on something so different. Premier Van Lines shipped it here from Ottawa. I think the support is because people do believe in love and they look for ways to declare their love."

Love Locks will return to Ottawa in June and once again be on display along the Rideau Canal. Martin is delighted about that "because the sculpture will only get bigger and bigger as people keep adding padlocks."

She especially likes the fact that Love Locks is an environmentally-friendly piece of art. All the keys dropped down the hollow support post will be collected and eventually used in a future sculpture.

The Rouge Gallery is located at 208 3rd Avenue South.



A few of the locks which are attached to the piece