

# Kovacic going big with painting project

Prince George artist and CNC Fine Arts instructor Betty Kovacic has been awarded \$19,500 from the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund to create her largest piece of work ever.

Kovacic will spend much of the next two years – besides teaching full-time at her home and at CNC – working on a six-by-16-foot painting. The mural, tentatively titled *Shadows of the Past*, will commemorate and recognize the experiences of ethno-cultural communities affected by Canada's first national internment operations from 1914 to 1920.

"It's a great delight and honour to receive this gift of funding," said Kovacic. "It's going to be in four sections, created in acrylic and mixed media. It will have some narrative qualities and incorporate my imagery, colours and process. I will use archival images obtained from various museums around Canada – I'm going to learn a lot by doing it."



Photo submitted

## Artist Betty Kovacic with working sketches for her new project.

During the internment operations, thousands of Canadian men, women and children of Ukrainian and other eastern European descent were branded as "enemy aliens." Many were imprisoned at various locations across Canada and forced to do heavy labour in the country's hinterlands such as Banff National Park and Spirit Lake Camp in the Abitibi region of Quebec. They were stripped of any wealth they had, disenfranchised and subjected to other state-sanctioned censures not because of anything they had done, but because of where they had come from and who they were.

In May 2008, representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian community reached an agreement with the federal government which provided for the creation of a \$10-million endowment fund to support commemorative, educational, scholarly and cultural projects intended to remind all Canadians of this episode in our nation's history.

Much of Kovacic's art work of the last 20 years has dealt with social issues and injustices,

many meanings and possibilities through my work. Seniors and many others are often overlooked and don't have a voice. A great deal of my work deals with issues that need to be expressed and experienced in a different manner. I can identify when a person loses humanity and dignity. They become objects. It happens over and over again."

Kovacic did her research before completing her submission package.

"I had a clear vision of what it could be, had a concept, knew it had to be large and realized that CNC would be the perfect location to display it – it has to be at CNC," she said.

The application process was complicated and time-consuming, with Kovacic having to complete two essays outlining her goals as well as working drawings, budget, resume

and letters of reference. She hopes that others will learn from the mural once it's unveiled.

"Art has an inherent quality that allows for learning," she said.

"Art speaks to us where written form does not. Colours, forms and images touch us on conscious and subconscious level. It has the ability to invoke compassion in the viewer.

Art opens up the possibility of broad interpretation."

The mural will be on loan to CNC and exhibited in a location that provides easy viewing access.

"I deal with the human condition and with voices that need to be heard," said Kovacic. "I can express