

ARTS & LIFE



WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Ottawa artist Karina Bergmans lays among some of the pillows she uses to create art works, which she then photographs. Bergmans will be holding a pillow installation at Blink Gallery today and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

Funky show letter-perfect

Ottawa artist invites visitors to play along with jumble pillows

BY DAYANTI KARUNARATNE

It started with a K. Like many people, Ottawa artist Karina Bergmans was immediately attracted to the letter that starts her name.

In recent years, letter pillows have become an outlet for stress, a subject for photography and even a method of preserving favourite clothing. Most recently, the alphabet — in pillow form — has taken centre stage as an interactive sculptural installation project.

Bergmans is taking part in the latter by holding a pillow installation at Blink Gallery until Sunday.

The project features a pile of quirky throw pillows, as well as photographs by the artist featuring words such as “cozy” and “warm,” in environments that challenge and amuse.

A low white rope cordons off the loose pile, but that shouldn't stop anyone from getting in on the fun. Visitors to the small gallery, a tiny heritage building opposite the National Gallery in Major's Hill Park, are encouraged to snap their own photographs. They can even take the pillows outside if they have a special location in mind.

“I love text and I love fonts,” says Bergmans.

By letting her interest in wordplay enter her art practice, she says she's learned a few things about messages — especially short ones so prevalent in the BlackBerry and Twitter age.

“It can ultimately be a more violent way of sending a message,” says the artist, “there's more weight to each word.” Compared to the days of long-hand letter writing, instant messaging can be seen as

“low,” and even aggressive in tone.

Which is exactly how Bergmans was feeling when she made the pair of U-shaped letter pillows. She already had an F pillow and she was in the mood to send the world a message. (Postcards of that expletive-laden greeting can be purchased at the gallery.)

'I love text and I love fonts'

KARINA BERGMANS, artist

Bergmans will also be sewing and selling her fashions, made from recycled and new fabric, at the gallery, which operates as a collective, so exhibiting artists must be present at all times.

A dynamic artist with a penchant for fabric, Bergmans will be behind her sewing machine this weekend adding items to a rack of funky, feminine creations. There's even a makeshift change room to try

on her playful clothing.

The artist recognizes that visitors may be a little reluctant to pick up a pillow and get involved in the participatory element of the show. She suggests composing a common word that has a big impact, or a word that will work well as a greeting card (thank-you postcards are also available).

“I like to play with the juxtaposition of things and with people's perceptions,” says Bergmans, whose degree in psychology helps her question human behaviour.

The pillows have also served to memorialize fabric, as is the case with the letters for “warm.”

“I was done with it,” Bergman says of a brown and white sweater.

“But it was one of my favourite sweaters, so I had to do something with it.”

Now it appears, trimmed with red faux-fur, in a number of photographs at the gallery, suggesting warmth against snowdrifts and beaches alike.

Face it: you're past your sell-by date

Gordon Ramsay's latest tirade is final proof that he's a celebrity who's had his day, says JUDITH WOODS.

News that Gordon Ramsay has had a roasting from his mother after an outburst of unforgivable rudeness to an Australian television reporter has garnered the usual headlines for the chef. After inexplicably making offensive remarks to Tracy Grimshaw about her facial mole and questioning her sexuality, he later mocked her at a cooking demonstration by holding up a picture of a naked woman with the features of a pig, telling the audience that she urgently needed Botox.

It was crude, unkind and unfunny and offered proof that there is, after all, such a thing as bad publicity. There was an air of desperate attention-seeking about Ramsay the man, which can only be a reflection of the current beleaguered position of Ramsay the brand.

His business empire was saved from collapse earlier this year only by the closing of three restaurants and the sinking of millions of his own money into the company. His much-vaunted reputation as a family man has been compromised by allegations of a seven-year extramarital affair.

And now the colossus of the culinary world has not only lost his Midas touch, but his common touch. What on earth can he have been thinking when he pointed to Grimshaw's facial mole and asked: “Is that a wart? It looks like your little sister's on your lip.” He presumably expected laughter and affirmation, and was shocked when he was met with opprobrium — the Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, publicly dismissed Ramsay as “a new form of low life.”

Yesterday, realizing that no one was cheering his brag-

gadocio, Ramsay issued a “unreserved” apology, saying that “with hindsight ... he realized his comments were inappropriate and offensive. But is it too little, far too late? We were once won over by his profane passion, his charisma outweighing the Anglo-Saxon epithets that salted his speech and peppered his conversation.

But then, somewhere along the line, we grew weary of a 42-year-old man displaying the F-word bravado of a posturing teena and the bullying insults dressed up as banter.

In any case, we should take pride in our collective sense of humour failure, because signals that we're losing our appetite for cruelty, provoked by the outbreak of guilt and recrimination among *Britain's Got Talent* viewers after discovering that singer Susan Boyle, an unworldly woman with learning difficulties, had checked into hospital because of the stress of taking part in the program.

Over at American Vogue, Anna “Nuclear” Wintour is stepping down, and will hopefully take her terrifying *Devil Wears Prada* ethos with her. The age of the despot (however enlightened she may be in the accessories department) is over, and overweening arrogance has had its day.

The economic downturn has made us reassess how we relate to one another, we are gravitating toward comfort, not confrontation. This newspaper recently reported a cheering return to music lessons, family board games and sewing clubs. Voluntary work is enjoying a boom; at the Red Cross, inquiries from volunteers have quadrupled since the economy began to falter.

If he chokes on enough humble pie in public, Ramsay could yet save himself: after all, the man has a recognizable skill. But the truth is that his days as an A-list celebrity are numbered. We've had fill of truculence and aggression for aggression's sake.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Hear tenor before he leaves for Juilliard

How difficult is it for a music student to land a spot in New York's prestigious Juilliard School? Ask 18-year-old Stittsville tenor Nathan Haller, who will begin voice studies at the school in September. From the applicants who submitted recordings, the school invited 680 singers to audition. Haller was one of only three tenors accepted into the undergrad-

uate program for the fall. Haller has been studying voice with Kanata voice teacher Judith Vachon since he was 10. He has sung in productions of the Orpheus Musical Theatre Society and in the chorus for Opera Lyra Ottawa. Music fans can hear Haller Sunday as part of a recital featuring Vachon's students, ranging from children to teenagers. Haller will perform *La donna è mobile* from *Rigoletto* and will join other students in duets

from the musical *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* and the 2001 animated film *Monsters, Inc.* The concert starts at 7:30 p.m. at Glen Cairn United Church, 140 Abbeyhill Dr. in Kanata. Tickets, at \$10, will be at the door.

Love of movies leads sisters to the web

Cinema Obsessed is a new blog/website devoted to movies that has been launched by two Ottawa sis-

ters. The website, www.cinemaobsessed.com, will have regular updates, with information on old and coming movies, trailers, photos, reviews, recommendations and a spot where you can discuss your favourite movies. Angie Sauvé, 23, who works at the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and her sister, Chantale, 25, a social worker, who own more than 1,500 movies, will run the site.

THE OTTAWA CITIZEN



Chef Gordon Ramsay may have finally gone too far when made offensive remarks about TV reporter Tracy Grimshaw.

