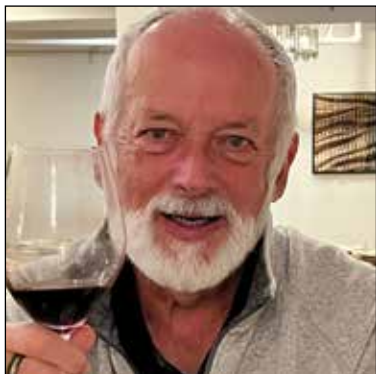


OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Art and imagination on display at the Clay and Glass Gallery



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Let's be honest: you may have never heard of the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery. Or, if you have, you probably have never visited the place.

Well, I am here to suggest that you rectify that situation, immediately, because there are a large number of special things about the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery that truly make it worth a visit.

First, it's unique. Located near Uptown Waterloo, it is the only art gallery in the country that is exclusively dedicated to exhibiting and collecting contemporary Canadian glass, ceramic, enamel and stained glass works of art.

Second, the folks at the gallery are brilliant at staging exhibitions. If you are a museum goer who is just a bit tired of crammed display cases and claustrophobic exhibition rooms, you are going to love the Clay and Glass. The building, which opened in 1993, is the very definition of spacious. More about this later.

Third, the exhibitions are always fresh. Clay and Glass PR director William Hlowatzki told us that the exhibitions are changed up every season. Right now, there are four exhibitions that will be on display for the next few months only.

Fourth, the gift shop offers a



The fantastical work, "Demon Teapot," by Lindsay Montgomery.

spectacular array of handcrafted glass and clay jewelry and other giftware made by Canadian artisans, many of them local to the southern Ontario region.

Fifth – and this may seem too good to be true – admission is free. Yes, anyone can enjoy the unique works in the Clay and Glass any time it is open – and it's open six days a week, closed only on Mondays.

I asked William how free admission could be possible, since clearly this is a professionally managed institution with staff, acquisition budgets and operating costs. He pointed to the list of donors – private people, corporations, foundations and government bodies – that keep this amazing institution afloat and moving ahead.

According to the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery's website, the museum owes its existence to Canadian ceramic artist Ruth Gowdy

McKinley, a founding member of "Ceramics Canada." When she died in 1981, her colleagues in that organization began to envision an art gallery honouring her memory that would focus on works created in clay, glass and enamel. The plan quickly moved forward; ground was broken in 1989 and the new gallery opened in 1993. The building was designed by Patricia Patkau of Patkau Architects of Vancouver and was honoured with a Governor General's Award for design. What makes that an even more significant accomplishment is, as William told us, the Clay and Glass was Patkau's first public building.

In parallel with the construction of the physical building was an endowment campaign led by the late Winifred Shantz and former board chair Ann Roberts, herself a ceramic artist of note and a professor in the University of Waterloo fine arts department.

Right now, there are four exhibitions on display at the Clay and

Glass. The most extensive is the utterly captivating "Fabled Clay," featuring the work of four artists: Janet MacPherson of Hamilton, Lindsay Montgomery of Toronto, Amélie Proulx of Lévis, Que., and Annette ten Cate of Grey County. The shared focus of these wildly diverse works is "story telling." Visitors will be enthralled by the stories inherent in the works – and will also be drawn into creating their own stories as they contemplate ornate teapots embraced by demons; a bear in bunny slippers; or a beer-swilling, naked "Shepherdess."

Nicely displayed in a smaller gallery room is the exhibition, "Frogs' Return," by Melanie Barnett of Treaty 7 Territory in Medicine Hat, Alta – a series of complex, whimsical ceramic creations involving said amphibians.

"Weathered Rock," a multi-faceted, multi-media work by D'Andrea Bowie of Whitchurch-Highlands, Ont., occupies another exhibition area. All

three of these exhibitions will continue through mid-May. The fourth current exhibit is "Material Syntax: 3D Printed Masonry Façade Systems," a display by University of Waterloo architecture students. It closed March 27.

The latter is just one example of how the gallery interacts with the community. In 2025, the gallery hosted 478 workshop sessions attended by 14,514 people. That is twice the number that attended workshops in 2024. Through community outreach programs, the gallery also staged 65 workshop sessions through the Region of Waterloo, reaching 3,000 participants.

I'm writing this feature because we quickly realized that the Clay and Glass Gallery offers a variety of day-trip options. Would-be visitors can investigate workshops, offered at a reasonable fee (see the website for details); or they can simply visit the gallery at no charge and spend as much time as they would like exploring the imaginations of these creative artists.

And some added good news: the gallery, located at 25 Caroline St. N in Waterloo, is on the edge of Waterloo Park, a perfect place for strolling and picnicking (in warmer weather, of course), and is also a block away from Uptown Waterloo. If good food is part of your day-trip agenda, high-end restaurants like Solé and Proof; good pubs like Beertown and McCabe's Irish Pub; and many other dining options are minutes away.

So, after a highly entertaining visit, I happily recommend the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery as a centrepiece for an intriguing day out.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past-president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



"Hibernation Mode," 2025, by Annette ten Cate. ten Cate is one of four artists whose works form the "Fabled Clay" exhibition. The work facing the camera in the background is "Goat and cohort" by the same artist.



A view of the very spacious and welcoming exhibition area. In the foreground, "Fish Monk," 2025, by Janet MacPherson.



"Les herbes de passage (Écureuils)" – which translates roughly as "passage grasses (squirrels)," 2020, by Amélie Proulx.