

■ Lieutenant-Governor's Awards for High Achievement in the Arts presented yesterday

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FREDERICTON — In some ways, Janice Wright Cheney's latest art exhibition featuring hundreds of fake rats was a little too successful.

Two of her friends were so creeped out they refused to see it.

"They said they loved me and they loved my work, but they would not be able to enter the room where the rats were," said the Fredericton textile artist.

"It was kind of funny because I thought to myself, 'Wow, I really did it.' One of the ideas behind the show was that some people would be unsettled by the very thought of it. But it's not a very good trajectory for an artist to follow, work that's so good no one wants to come see it."

Despite the unease and tension built into such a display, plenty of people were drawn to the rat show, called *Cellar*, held in a dimly lit corner of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery's basement earlier this year, proving her other point: we are attracted to things that repulse us.

Children in particular seemed to be drawn to the creatures, stitched together with the recycled fur of animals that many people like to wear close to their skin — mink, beaver and seal to name a few.

The popular exhibit, which next appears at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax in 2014, is one of the reasons the instructor at the New Brunswick College of Craft



STEPHEN MACGILLIVRAY/THE DAILY GLEANER

This year's recipients of the Lieutenant Governor Awards for high achievement in the arts are, from left, Melvin Gallant of Grand-Barachois, Jenny Munday of Sackville and Janice Wright Cheney of Fredericton.

and Design in Fredericton won one of this year's Lieutenant-Governor's Awards for High Achievement in the Arts at a ceremony last night, taking the prize in the

visual arts category.

The other winners were veteran literary critic and writer Melvin Gallant, who penned the popular *Ti-Jean* series among his other

books for young readers, and playwright Jenny Munday, who has dedicated herself to developing new Canadian work for the stage with pieces such as *Never Drive*

East Before Noon.

The grand man of Grand Barachois won for best French language literary arts, while Munday of Sackville took the prize for performing arts.

The winners take home \$20,000 each.

Wright Cheney began her career after she graduated from Mount Allison University with a fine arts degree in 1983. Trained as a painter, she soon began experimenting with textile-based work and made the complete switch from two to three-dimensional art about 14 years ago.

"Instead of making pictures of things, I started making things," she said. "I used things like embroidery, knitting, felting and dying. Those materials resonate with associations, such as women making things."

Her jump from canvas to stuffed rats wasn't much of a leap, considering her lifelong interest in creepy crawlies. As a painter and drawer, she spent a good deal of time researching and talking to biologists before making imagery of cockroaches, fleas, snakes and the like. She reads a lot and thinks about the themes she's developing before putting her hands to work.

"Dealing with all those insects, I was thinking of vermin and how we have relationships with creatures based on our comfort level and how they're beneficial to us or not," she said.

"Rats are a logical choice. Pictures of rats are one thing but to actually make rats life-size and put them in a room for people to see, creates a whole other reaction. You're walking into it and they're around you. That's why I wanted to make a lot of rats."