

Unfiled – the 40 years later exhibit

By Hilary Thompson, NG Times. May 6, 2015

If you were wandering through Old Town Kemptville this past weekend you may have noticed a new addition to the usual slew of stores that line Prescott Street. A red sign that said “The Wellstein Gallery” marked the entryway to 113 Prescott Street where artist Tom Graham hosted a weekend-long exhibition exploring the process of design and the way information is documented, preserved and remembered.

The exhibition called “Unfiled” is really the brainchild of Tom’s younger self. He held the original exhibition called “File” in his last year as an art student at York University in 1975 – 40 years ago.

As a young art student Tom became fascinated with documenting, archiving and organizing information so it could be easily retrieved and referred to in the future. The original exhibition was a showcase featuring his personal filing system and the contents, as well as 3 handmade archival storage boxes. After the exhibition Tom kept one box while the other two were sold or given away – to be “buried” until a later date.

“That show had intended to preserve the information almost in a time capsule format to be looked at in the future,” Tom said. “I figure this is the future.”

This year Tom tracked down the two boxes what were no longer in his possession and borrowed them from their owners. At the current exhibition all three boxes sat in a row with their lids to one side, just as they did in 1975, but now full of the owners’ own photographs, artwork, information and memories. A video of Tom going to retrieve the boxes was placed opposite a slide show of pictures taken at the original exhibition, giving the visitor a sense that they were somehow straddling time.

Other parts of the exhibition focused on the process of art and design thinking. One room featured Tom’s old student desktop (which he made out of a piece of plywood and brown paper) complete with doodles,



notes and ideas. Photocopies from his notebook were also displayed throughout the space, giving a glimpse into the processes of a creative mind.

Tom wanted to have the exhibition in Kemptville to show some of his early work to the community. The gallery also showcased a lot of his work since he finished school and moved to Bishop’s Mills in 1975 including sketches of local buildings, postcards depicting vintage appliances, tools, and clothes, and shadow boxes featuring antique objects.

“It was a chance for me to show this material to people in Kemptville because they know what I have been doing in business for the past 25 years, but they don’t know what I was doing before that,” he said.

The overarching goal of the exhibition was to start a conversation and explore the possibilities of archiving and documenting art and ideas so that you can see the process, not simply the end product. A lofty goal but one that was presented in a very thought-provoking way. Not a bad use for the walls of a usually empty building in old town Kemptville.