

All roads lead to the Aurora Cultural Centre in new exhibitions



By Brock Weir

Three artists set out on very different personal journeys – two over water, and the other delving deep into himself to find his roots.

Their divergent paths have come together, however, in a harmonious dual exhibition now underway at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Marissa Sweet was a young woman when she gathered up her belongings in 1994, setting off from her native Philippines for a new life in Canada. She was preceded by just a handful of years by Erika Takacs, an ethnic Hungarian who left her birthplace of Transylvania for the same destination.

Both women set off largely alone, with their whole lives essentially stuffed into a suitcase as they embarked on their journey.

"I just took a leap of faith, not knowing what was going to be my future here," says Marissa. "I just knew it was going to be an adventure and I had to be brave."

Although they come from very different worlds, both women ended up settling in the Oshawa area, but until the artists came together in local creative circles, they had no idea just how similar their lives, their paths, and indeed their tastes, were.

The result is *Passage Between Two Worlds*, a new exhibition which formally opened Saturday at the Aurora Cultural Centre. The first formal collaboration between the two artists, it celebrates their similarities and differences, charting their respective journeys and their wildly divergent – yet eerily similar – visions of their new homeland.

"We found we have many similar interests although we're from two different parts of the world," explains Erika. "We were both interested in folklore, history, legends, stories, and mythology, aspects which are different according to our ethnicity, but we found common threads."

Dancing was one such common thread with Erika, a sculptor, letting her fingers do the walking, creating figures of a traditional Romanian bottle dance out of clay. This is contrasted with the work of painter Marissa, who complements the work with a painting of traditional Philippine candle dance.

But, it was through mythology that they first found it might be worth looking a bit deeper into their similarities.

"I really admire Erika's brilliant way of grasping emotional content on each sculpture," says Marissa. "We looked at each other's body of work and we realised we had something that really communicated with each other. Some of her sculptures inspired me to

paint based on it. Her Medusa, for me, was about fear. I am afraid of snakes, so when I saw her sculpture I went into fear mode, but then asked what I'm afraid of. It made me look internally.

?My painting, which is called Fighting Fears, was all about my fears and how I am fighting and trying to overcome because I don't want to remain in that fear mode and I wanted to show people that you can strive to get out of it. It made me face my fear because now I am talking about snakes and painting about claustrophobia, heights, and all things that symbolize fear for me.?

Through their first joint exhibition, they ? and curator Stephanie Nicolo ? hope their work inspires others to look deeper into themselves and consider their own journeys to this point.

?We hope it becomes a space for conversation and story sharing,? says Ms. Nicolo.?This is a show that is open to all individuals who have become a part of our Canadian mosaic. This is their space where they can come and see and share their own stories in the canvas on the walls, or in the sculpture.

Next Week: Newmarket artist Donald Chretien takes art lovers on a journey through his Aboriginal roots in Mino Miikana Bimaadiziwin. Both exhibitions run through September 12 at the Aurora Cultural Centre.