Aurora High Grads bring magical ?vision? to Cultural Centre



By Brock Weir

When he was a youngster, James Zhang was inspired by the fantastic.

The Grade 12 student from Aurora High School (AHS) was captivated by the magic and wonder of books, movies and TV. But as he grew up watching things like the Power Rangers, he had little idea how much of an influence it would have on his future path. Yet, it is now clear for all to see as an exhibiting artist, along with his fellow grads, at AHS' art show, which opened Wednesday at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Visitors to the ground floor Meridian Gallery can take in an image of a scorpion fighting an eagle in a fantasy landscape. It is something of a departure from the other works up on display, but very close to the kind of artist James is, and the architect he hopes to become when he pursues his post-secondary career this fall.

?When I was 10 or 12, I started reading this series called ?The Amulet,'? he says. ?I always knew I had an interest in fantasy, but the more I read the books, the cooler the concept seemed to me because this was a world that didn't develop in our branch where we went down the science path; they went down the magic path. The buildings were really old, but stylish in that way. It was shaped by magic and that was really cool to me. I wanted to bring that into the real world.?

For Stephanie Nicolo, curator at the Aurora Cultural Centre, there is a lot of magic to go around in this early winter season thanks to the talents of local students. The AHS exhibition, which runs through January 30, is the third and final installment of the ART GRADS 2016 series, which also included exhibitions from Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, and there just might be an underlying theme here.

?I like the idea of bringing magic to the real world,? she says. ?That is what happens every January. There is a little bit of magic that comes from the high school artists, so we are always happy and proud to be able to showcase the perspectives they all bring.?

And it is all about the perspectives, according to visual arts teacher Lee-Anne Moore. As she surveyed the work her students had created ahead of the exhibition, she said there was a mix of ?pride and panic ? pride in their ?exemplary work?, of course, but also panic in the logistics of organizing a full gallery show.

?We used the term ?vision' to encapsulate the main idea of the show because many eyes and facial expressions started to come up [in the work],? says Ms. Moore. ?The idea of a perspective and a vision for the world is the approach we decided to take together, and it came together as a result of working together through the year, but it wasn't an objective we began with. It is all about different

perspectives and that idea of having a vision.?

Diversity and the playfulness with colour, she said, is what strikes her the most and brings about considerable pride. Then, there is the talent overall.

?Students do have a voice,? she says. ?They have something to say in terms of who they are as individuals and each person has a vision.?

James agrees: ?An [exhibition like this] gives me a really good opportunity to show my creativity and what goes on in my mind. I want people to know that Grade 12s can be creative. The pieces she makes us do, with her guidance, helps us, and by showing it we can get feedback from the public. They will say some positive things, some negative things, but we can grow off that and it is kind of nice!?