

Art fuels imagination and emotion at Youth Arts celebration



When words simply won't do, art can often do the talking.

Each brushstroke, snap of a shutter, or the stitch of a needle can be expressive and healing, but putting it up for members of the public to view and enjoy can also be a cathartic experience.

Local high school students shared their joys and sorrows with members of the public through their visual art on Wednesday night at the grand opening of the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, a joint exhibition at the Aurora Cultural Centre, curated by Grade 12 students from Aurora High School, St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, and ESC Renaissance.

For St. Max student Sabrina Scinocco, the art she created with her best friend and peer Jocelyn Barrowclough was more than just two complimentary paintings on the wall of the Aurora Cultural Centre's Blue Gallery, it was a very potent and timely message.

The duo created a diptych ? two images intended to be displayed together ? called ?Inside Out,? Sabrina's self-portrait is an evocative piece representing her inner feelings while Jocelyn's portrait is faceless, the void that would ordinarily be occupied by a face instead filled with discarded pages from a book.

?We wanted to do a piece like this because it connects us as best friends,? said Sabrina. ?I have problems I have dealt with on the outside like sexual harassment ??

?And I have dealt with issues more like anxiety and depression,? added Jocelyn.

'We're advocates for persons facing both of these challenges,' Sabrina continues. 'This diptych represents the connection between our friendships and how we both help each other get through these problems. To be honest, if I didn't have her I would have been lost. That is why this piece means so much to us and why we wanted to curate a show.'

Jocelyn notes she made a conscious decision to paint her portrait without a face to 'represent anxiety and the losing of self.'

'If you look closely, the book pages relate to friendship, which is something that really helped me get through stuff like that.'

'We want viewers to consider the connections you can find with people and think about the story you can tell with artwork - not by really saying something, but showing something and taking a deeper meaning of art and how you can really say something when you don't know how to express them,' said Sabrina. 'Even now, it was hard for me to talk about it during our critique. We still cried a lot, it was hard, but it felt better and it felt like I got something off my chest. We're not scared anymore.'

The genesis of the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts came from a 2011 art exhibition featuring the works of Aurora High School Students. It has grown significantly with each passing year, bringing together students from across Aurora - and across school board and the public and independent school divide - all fuelled by a passion for expressing themselves through art.

The exhibition received the support of the Mayor's Office in 2017, and this support has been unwavering ever since.

'This is an important event, providing an opportunity for young people to come together, be creative, have fun and experience something meaningful,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas at Wednesday night's exhibition opening. 'We all know art inspires imagination, confidence, leadership, creative thinking and social engagement. It helps our youth build skills to move forward and create a good foundation for their future. With every art piece a student creates, they are using their creativity, their vision, dreams, wonder and sense of the world. This is an excellent opportunity for all of us, as adults, to better understand our youth and the issues that matter most to them.'

The exhibition is also an important one for the Aurora Cultural Centre, said Executive Director Suzanne Haines.

'As a professional gallery venue, our work is deeply enriched by having young voices in our space with this kind of exhibition,' she said. 'It is meaningful to have the collaboration with the schools and the school boards as we serve the community. It is an opportunity for students to collaboratively curate their art, choose themes, placement and learn from professional staff on how to build an exhibit of mixed work. The significance

for the graduates to show their work for families, friends and for their portfolio ? and it is important for us as a cultural institution to see, learn and experience what Grade 12 students are expressing in this, their final year before moving into the next phase of their careers and lives. We thank you for sharing your voice and creations with us.?

Although she was unable to attend last Wednesday's opening, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev had the chance to tour the exhibition the previous Saturday and, in a written message, shared her congratulations with all participating students.

?This evening, we recognize the incredible talents and achievements of our local Grade 12 students. It is remarkable to witness and celebrate the next generation of artists who may not know it but are inspiring others to pursue and embrace the arts,? she said. ?Each artist is showcasing their talents boldly and I have no doubt will achieve greatness through their dedication to the arts. I would like to thank the students for having the courage to share their artwork with us in this exhibit and the teachers, families and friends who continue to inspire and encourage these students to showcase their talents.?

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art continues at the Aurora Cultural Centre through February 29, with a special evening dedicated to Performing Arts set for Wednesday, February 19, at 7 p.m.

By Brock Weir