

## MCOYA 2025 showcases powerhouse talents of Grade 12 artists



Art can serve as a powerful method of self-expression and drawing attention to the issues that matter to you.

This has proved particularly true for Aurora's Madison Kwok. A Grade 12 student, Kwok is marking the end of her high school career as one of more than 50 area graduates whose work now adorns the walls of the Aurora Cultural Centre and Aurora Town Square as part of the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts. (MCOYA)

MCOYA opened at the Aurora Cultural Centre with a gala reception on Friday evening where Madison was one of dozens of participating artists on hand to provide insight on what inspires them.

With a focus on climate change, one of the four pieces Kwok submitted for this year's show depicts a whale ? but, instead of the more traditional depictions of leathery skin, Kwok's whale is comprised of garbage, particularly plastic waste, one can sadly find floating in ocean waters.

?Pollution has worsened in the past few decades,? Madison explained. ?There's a lot more plastic pollution that has ended up in the ocean and whales are affected the most, so I decided to depict the whale and cover it in the most commonly-found recyclable items in the oceans.?

The mammoth creature comes together in a collection of bottles, plastic caps, paper plates and plastic utensils to make an evocative image.

?I care a lot about animals and they mean a lot to me and I wanted this to be my final piece for my final art course in high school,? said Madison. ?Making these types of artworks that are visually appealing will help introduce people who aren't really into visual arts to serious topics about social issues.

?Art definitely helps my confidence because it has always been a good way of expressing internal feelings or things I don't like talking about. It has always been a source of happiness to me, especially while am going through the process. I'm usually really proud of myself and to be able to let people see my journey as an artist and the struggles I have been through as an artist is really rewarding and satisfying.?

This is exactly the idea of MCOYA, which is now in its 15th season.

"MCOYA cements the power of art as a tool for artists to tell their story and lived experiences," said Adora Lau, Gallery Assistant for the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday night. "To exhibiting students, I want to say your artworks here may only be a small piece of your art and your high school experience, but it also marks your personal growth, your pride, and your art."

These sentiments were shared by a number of dignitaries in attendance, including Mayor and Council, and representatives from the show's sponsor, Geranium Homes.

Mayor Mrakas reiterated his office's continued support for the student-led art show and hailed the event's return to its traditional home at 22 Church Street after it re-located to temporary gallery space at Town Hall to allow for construction on Town Square.

"This historic building has long been a space for learning, creativity and community and it is wonderful that its halls are once again filled with the powerful work of Aurora's youth," he said, noting that MCOYA provides artists "a platform to share their vision and explore powerful themes."

"I want to recognize the very talented students here tonight from Aurora High School, Bayview Secondary School, Cardinal Carter, Dr. G.W. Williams, ESC Renaissance, St. Andrew's, and St. Maximilian Kolbe. Your creativity, passion and hard-work is inspiring and we're so proud to be showcasing your art right here," he continued. "Art brings people together. It helps to see the world in new ways. It can challenge us, move us, and even shape society itself. I know many students are preparing for their next chapter: graduating, pursuing further education, exploring career opportunities. No matter where life takes you, I hope you keep creating. Keep pushing."

One such artist who is looking forward to continuing the creation of art in their post-secondary career is Thandia Lord who took an unusual approach to exhibiting in MCOYA. Instead of the more traditional forms of paint on canvas or well-moulded sculptures out of clay, Lord used various forms of papier-mache to forge masks that Hollywood would otherwise create through CGI.

"I have always drawn and painted and I come from a very artistic family " and my mom did special events," said Lord, adding the idea was first sparked in an attempt to recreate makeup synonymous with The Joker.

While Lord plans on studying bio-conservation rather than art in post-secondary, that choice has, in turn, inspired a new artistic direction.

"My grandmother had a great idea of finding a more natural way of doing special effects makeup because I do care a lot about the environment and a lot of pieces are inspired by the environment," said Lord. "I would like to somehow find a way to incorporate both."

MCOYA runs at the Aurora Cultural Centre through April 20, and there are several events planned in association with the exhibition throughout its run " including a demonstration of mask-making from Thandia Lord.

For more information, visit [auroraculturalcentre.ca/mcoya25](http://auroraculturalcentre.ca/mcoya25).

Participating artists this year include Gwendolyn Allen, Holly Binelli, Gaby Bossie, Dasha Briskin, Damian Calusic, Helena Cellucci, Sumaya Chaudary, Phoebe Clune, Zenyx Crombez, Milena Darbinyan, Kamilia Desroches Parchment, Kiran Dhargalkar, Charlie Emerson, Angela Fang, Danelle Feng, Christina Filosa, Gloria Foo-Fat, Jasmine Harding, Gabia Harris, Olivia Hashem, Rain Jiang, Myia Kandola, Thomas Kelly, Narmineh Khurram, Isabella Kim, Ryan Kiss, Uliana Kobyakova, Nathan Kurtes, Madison Kwok, Morgane Le Quere, Thandia Lord, Eleni Medeiros, Wayne Meng, Nava Mirbagher, Kiana Mottley, Alexandra Mumford, Claire Narduzzo, Coral Ng, Joycelyn Ng, Vanessa Phung, Sarah Poncelet, Myriam Portelance, Alessia Pugliese, Evelyn Scott, Jelena Shakkour, Allen Shi, Sarina Sajjadi, Brenda Salomone, Valerie Santoianni, Kingsman Tang, Crystal Tran, Mikayla Tripolino, Raegan Whittaker, Elaine Yang, and Molly Zupancic.

**By Brock Weir**