

Cultural Centre shines light on community artist Grace Shi



Growing up in northeastern China, Grace Shi developed a love of nature in a climate similar to what we enjoy in southern Ontario.

It's an environment that fuelled her creativity, but had to take a backseat to her career in her native country's financial sector.

Now retired and calling Aurora home, Shi is experiencing the first solo exhibition of her colourful art, which blends Eastern and Western techniques, at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The show, "Seasons of Being", opened at the Centre's temporary gallery space at Town Hall on May 11 and culminates with a closing reception this Thursday, May 18, from 6 - 8 p.m. on the building's second floor.

"Having participated in numerous group exhibitions across the GTA, Shi holds an extensive portfolio of paintings and drawings, waiting patiently to be presented in their own show," said the Cultural Centre. "We're honoured to be the gallery to host Grace Shi's first ever solo exhibition.

"Shi identifies one main protagonist in her work: the light. She believes in the animism of the world; everything as a source of energy, life, and spirit. Often using the people closest to her in life as an inspiration, Shi uses the power of imagination to extend their spirit into the painted world around them. In Seasons of Being, Shi takes us on a fantastical journey through time and space."

Holding her first solo exhibition at the Aurora Cultural Centre is particularly fitting for Shi as the Centre's once and future home at the historic Church Street School was one of the landmarks that first struck her after moving to the community. The Centre, and examples of public art throughout Aurora, was part of what sealed the deal for her coming to call Aurora home, and its natural and built heritage continues to inspire.

"When I retired and left my [the financial world] I wanted to devote all my time to painting," says Shi, who pursued fine arts further at Centennial College. "In China, I wanted to be an artist, but it's difficult because competition is very heavy."

She read Russian literature frequently in her youth, which fostered an interest in what she describes as "western life" and Canada's "pure air" and multiculturalism made emigrating feel like a natural fit.

In Aurora, she finds inspiration in our local green spaces, and those throughout the GTA.

Water, maple leaves, Chinese botanicals and more can often be seen in her paintings, which depict nature and human subjects in

equal measure.

"I hope the audience looking at my art will feel it's like a breath of fresh air and that they can step in and live in the situation I created," says Shi.

To step into the world of Grace Shi through "Seasons of Being", head over to the second floor of Town Hall before 8 p.m. this Thursday, May 18, or have a digital experience at auroraculturalcentre.ca/gallery-exhibitions/seasons.

By Brock Weir
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