

2Spirit artist Patrick Hunter lends his talents to Pflag event

There might be a few weeks until Pride Month begins in June, but local residents can get into the spirit early with a "fabulous" afternoon at the Aurora Public Library hosted by Pflag York Region.

On Saturday, May 6, 2Spirit Ojibwe Woodland artist Patrick Hunter, hailing from Red Lake, ON, will lead registrants through a painting class being billed as a "Fabulous Adventure."

Hunter will lead everyone registered "and there is currently a wait list" through the fundamentals of painting techniques in a positive environment, the importance of mental health and healing through the arts, and the spiritual significance and history of the Woodland Art form in Indigenous communities.

"The intention behind the classes is just to impart on my participants the artistic confidence that they can start and finish an art piece with me in three hours and hopefully that inspires them to be more creative at home," says Hunter. "It's kind of like a step-by-step process taking it from a blank canvas to a very colourful feather that I have designed and they get to choose between seven different designs of feathers."

Why feathers? That will be fully revealed at the event, but Hunter provides a teaser: "Whenever you're given an eagle feather by a community leader or elder, it's like a badge of honour. You have gone through something difficult and you have come out the other side a better person."

"There are two types of people who come into my classes and one of them is excited to be there, excited to learn, and the other person has a lot of anxiety, a lot of self-doubt, self-deprecation of their abilities, and it's cool to see that person who is a little bit more scared to paint turn their tune around a little bit [and say] 'I actually did something cool today.'"

Hunter's love of art really bloomed when he got his first 100 per cent in Grade 11 on a Woodland-style painting. His mark made him think, "Maybe I have something here." Yet, while he grew up with the Woodland style of art, he says he really didn't have context on what he was seeking.

"I had a really great art teacher in high school who gave me the background on it: 'Pretend you have spiritual x-ray goggles where you can see the spirit of what it is you're looking at.' Okay, got it," he says. "When things sort of had that lens to look through, everything has a vibe, everything is colourful in the spirit world. Once I had that, I never stopped painting, really."

"I have been self-employed now for the last 10 years and doing commission work and stuff like that is definitely part of the job. Teaching, I was trash in the beginning, I wasn't very good at it, but you have to start and fail forward as much as you can to get better. Now I have taught thousands of people to paint and I have a process down on how to alleviate some of the anxiety that comes into creating art pieces."

But, like that second type of student who comes to his classes, self-realization is also an important part of Hunter's artistic journey.

"I didn't get truly successful until I put that out there, that I was a gay man and also Indigenous at the same time," he says. "Once I got a little more authentic with myself and putting it out there to the social media audience, that is when things started to really kick off and resonate with people. In these classes on the last tour, I have probably taught more than 750 people, and I think it's interesting and meaningful to younger people when they can see you can be out and accepted in the world, and also this job's being an artist and entrepreneur "they can see it and they can see that it is something that is possible. I think when I was growing up, it wasn't really a career option to be an entrepreneur, especially as an artist. I like to kind of fill in that gap and sort of just leave it all out on the table that this is how I did it, this is what I do now."

For more information on the upcoming event, and to find your place on the waitlist, visit pflagyork.ca/coffeenight/programs.

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