

Apparitions abound as artist Hourie and Cultural Centre dive into macabre



By Brock Weir

Award-winning artist Troy Hourie creates a world of wonder.

Whether it unfolds on the stage, within a small cabinet, or in the palm of the hand, he focuses on creating awe and advancing the form of ?spectatorship? into an experience that is wholly immersive ? and sometimes a bit spooky.

The Aurora resident, who has taken his work around the world, has just finished transforming the Blue Gallery at the Aurora Cultural Centre into just such a spectacle in Apparitions, a mixed-media installation inspired by the Benjamin Britten Opera ?The Turn of the Screw? taking the form of The Bed, The Attic and the Writing Cabinet, allowing the viewer to immerse themselves in various experiences at varying levels, all through the eyes of Miles, Flora, and the ghostly Quint.

?I have been working on this project for over six years,? says Mr. Hourie, whose practice began in performance design in New York, where he has 15 years' experience under his belt. ?I have a bit of an obsession over the idea of apparitions, which is part of it, but most of my work as an artist now is based on the idea of creating wonder, creating awe, and creating a more advanced form of spectatorship. A viewer, particularly with this piece, is probably going to be more participatory than a normal art installation because it is immersive and the video component is all interactive.?

The piece follows Quint, a valet character in the opera which, in turn, was based on Henry James' The Turn of the Screw. Quint has two wards, the children Miles and Flora, but Quint is a ghost who is haunting them.

?It's sort of a journey, it's sort of a haunted house, but, more importantly, it is a journey to immerse people in an esoteric story,? Mr. Hourie explains. ?Since I was younger, I have always been interested in the idea of ghosts, but I think, in particular, it is the music in The Turn of the Screw [that interests] me. A lot of my work deals with Victoriana and I like the macabre. I like things that are odd, things that are creepy?and I find everyone has a sense of fear. There is a sense of awe, but [also] exploring what makes people afraid, what doesn't what makes me afraid, what doesn't. It's based on childhood dreams and stories.?

During the run of Apparitions, which is on now through November 10, the public will have an opportunity to experience the ?experience? in a number of different ways.

Mr. Hourie is hosting a Youth Workshop Opportunity beginning this Saturday, October 13, that will provide students with an opportunity to experience his creative process of immersing the body into an artistic space, challenging participants to ?reflect on their own interpretations of fear, nightmares, dreams haunted houses, ghosts and sorrow by researching visuals that represent each of these ideas to them.?

Participating youth will then be guided by the artist through the creation of their own art project on October 27 and the finished works will be on display in an exhibition day on Saturday, November 10.

These classes are provided free thanks to funding from the Ontario Arts Council.

On Hallowe'en Night, trick-or-treaters are invited to come through The Bed, The Attic and the Writing Cabinet to experience it themselves, and maybe encounter a few surprises along the way. This drop in is free as well.

?This is not entertainment, it is actually trying to create a way to connect,? says Mr. Hourie. ?I am using my work to connect technology with historical items of different kinds of artwork and perceptual devices, then creating a new language for presentation. For me, as an artist, it is a way of interacting with the viewer and I enjoy watching how audiences participate in the work. My neighbour looks at my work and he said to me the other day, ?I just don't understand what you're doing,' but when you get into a space and you're forced to participate, then you get it. It is like sharing that part of myself?that people think is odd and kind of weird.?

At the end of the day, he says his aim through Apparitions, the fourth iteration of the work, is to encourage people to ?experience? more art, rather than just look at it on the walls.

?Canadians in general, we're very comfortable at home and many of us haven't travelled and many of us don't go to see art,? he says. ?There is a whole different sensibility. I would encourage everyone to go out and see art and try to understand it, or not understand it but at least give it a chance: see theatre, see art, learn what you can reflect on. The sense of awe is just challenging yourself all the time.?

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