

Art exhibition inspired by historic place of healing?



People today have many places of healing.

At the top of the pyramid might be the local hospital, but for others it might be a trip to a healing retreat or simply a walk in nature.

For generations of Aurorans, the community's primary place of healing was Hillary House, home to just as many generations of doctors. Now Aurora's only National Historic Site and home to the Koffler Museum of Art, the 1862 landmark has served as the inspirational backdrop to members of the Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA) exploring the theme of healing.

SOYRA members are hard at work putting the finishing touches on pieces that will line the walls of Hillary House and Town Hall for *'Inspirations from a Space of Healing'* from December 10 through January 28.

Co-curated by the Aurora Historical Society and the Aurora Cultural Centre, both organizations are eager to see just what elements of Hillary House and its collections inspired meditations on the theme.

'Because of Hillary House's unique [role] of being a doctor's office and a home, we kept coming back to this theme of healing,' says Kathleen Vahey, Curator for the Aurora Historical Society (AHS) who has been brainstorming possibilities of an art exhibition in collaboration with the Cultural Centre since joining the AHS in 2020.

The Cultural Centre was eager to partner as well and felt the theme of healing particularly timely.

'We're in this time of 'moving away from COVID,' says Samantha Jones, the Aurora Cultural Centre's Gallery Manager, using air quotes, *'and it has been such a unique illness because it has touched everyone's home ' even if we're not sick ourselves, it has impacted our lives in monitoring our health, our neighbours' health, and our family's health from afar and it has been at the centre of everyone's minds. No matter where you go in the world, and especially at home, it kind of follows you. That's something I have been thinking about and something we encouraged the artists to think about when developing work for this show.'*

Ahead of developing the show, artists were given free rein to explore Hillary House and its artefacts. There were elements of pharmaceuticals, interventions, and what Vahey describes as *'institutionalized healing,'* but there were other areas that could be considered places of healing as well, such as the kitchen at the heart of the house.

?We took all the artists on a tour of the house and gave them a good context of the history of the house, then we let them wander and gravitate towards whatever they felt most connected to,? says Vahey. ?I felt that process was really interesting because we did it in kind of formal sessions but we also told the artists throughout the summer they were more than welcome to come back and do sketches and look at different parts of the house in different daylights, time of day? it was really interesting to see how people interacted with the theme differently. Some people were very much attracted to the pharmaceutical bottles or the medical equipment, but other people were much more attracted to something they related to personally and I think that really has been reflected in the art we've gotten back. There is such a wide spread in terms of how people interpreted the theme of healing.

?We have a collection of sketches which is just the preliminary work from the artist, but you can see the notes they've jotted down, the personal connections to different spaces or objects and some of those will be in the galleries. It will be nice to see how the artists have personally connected.?

Inspirations from a Space of Healing will open at Hillary House and the Aurora Cultural Centre's temporary gallery space at Town Hall on December 10, running through January 8. An opening reception will be held at Hillary House National Historic Site on December 10 from 1 ? 3 p.m.

For more information, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter