

Art of Storytelling celebrates Indigenous art, culture in downtown Aurora



Telling stories through art is at the heart of a new art exhibition on now in downtown Aurora, one which will have a lasting impact on the community.

The Art of Storytelling, celebrating Indigenous art, is on now at the Royal Rose Gallery, on the west side of Yonge Street just south of Wellington.

The brainchild of curator Rosa Calabrese-Teal, the exhibition features the work of nearly a dozen Indigenous artists, some of which have been added to the Royal Rose Gallery's permanent collection.

Running until April 15, the exhibit will be held in conjunction with artist talks, activities, demonstrations, and a special opening reception this Saturday, March 4, with some of the participating artists on hand to talk about their work.

Pieces that have been secured permanently by the gallery are hoped to be part of a collection that can be enjoyed by local schools to foster students' interest in Indigenous art.

"The response has been great," says Calabrese-Teal of the early feedback she's received since the work went up on the walls of her space, which was occupied for more than a century by Caruso's. "People are absolutely open to learning and engaging with the art, and I am also finding educators want to bring their classes here and we can do outreach programs. With the permanent collection we've acquired as well, we can go into the schools, do programming, and teach them about Indigenous art, letting them see original pieces" and it's always different than seeing something in a book.

"My goal would be to loan out the collection for a certain amount of time to the school so that the kids can actually have time to look at it, process it, and then go into the school and do artwork with them. Sometimes an hour-and-a-half workshop is just not enough time to soak it all in. Ideally, it would be very nice to put it on loan in various locations, whether it's schools, Town Hall, somewhere at the Library where people can not only see it but sit with it for a little bit."

Calabrese-Teal has always had a love for Indigenous art.

As she's helped bring this exhibition together, she says she has learned so much about the narrative nature of the art.

Norval Morrisseau, a founder of the Woodlands School of Art, has always been a favourite and the works that have been brought

together reflect this influence.

?I'm hoping to have some artists come in and be present so the community can come in and engage with the artists themselves,? says Calabrese-Teal. ?Ellen Cowie is one of our feature artists and she has done a painting of Emmerson Benson in his dancing regalia, so we're hoping to have Ellen and Emmerson just to talk about their experiences and why she created it and, again, it is nice to talk to the artists. I want people to come in and know there is so much more to learn and even though the exhibit itself will only be open through April 15, we will have ongoing programs of Indigenous art.?

The Royal Rose Gallery is located at 15210 Yonge Street. Artists represented include Stephan Snake, Carl Beam, John Laford, Ellen Cowie, Leland Bell, Norval Morrisseau, Derek Harper and Jasyn Lucas. For more information, visit royalroseart.ca.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter