

Art students find their voice at Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts



By Brock Weir

Art never fails to spark a conversation, but when nearly sixty students from all four of Aurora's high schools come together to share over 100 pieces of their creativity, this conversation hits a community crescendo.

You can be a part of this dialogue at the Aurora Cultural Centre through March 2 at the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts.

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts formally opened February 8 (delayed from February 6 due to inclement weather) at a formal reception hosted by the student artists themselves, and many local dignitaries, including Councillors Harold Kim and Wendy Gaertner.

In his remarks, representing Mayor Tom Mrakas, Councillor Kim said the first time he visited the student art show, now in its ninth year, in 2015, he took note of the "dark" theme of that particular year. This time, however, he said he was struck by the "vibrant colours and myriad different topics" the students have brought to the walls, whether drawn, painted or photographed.

"I am pleased to be here on behalf of the Town of Aurora and Aurora Town Council for a celebration of creativity and artistic talent," said Councillor Kim. "The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts is an important event for students to see their creations on display and gives them a chance to be proud of their artistic accomplishments. I would like to thank the artists here today from Aurora High School, Cardinal Carter, Dr. G.W. Williams and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School for coming together to display their creative and unique pieces.

"Art inspires imagination, confidence, leadership, creative thinking and social engagement. It helps our youth build skills to move forward and create a good foundation for the future. When I was in high school, I was very shy and I had a desire to go into visual and performing arts, but was too shy and thought it wasn't cool. [Now], I regret not having taken any of the arts because if you look at society, every successful entrepreneur, politician, or people in other disciplines, they all have one common denominator, and they have some kind of experience in the performing or visual arts. It takes away all the inhibitions you have, you're expressive, and unless you know who you are and you express your feelings, it's hard to be successful in life in any discipline you go into. I applaud all of you guys for getting out there early and getting involved in the arts."

These sentiments were shared by the Aurora Cultural Centre's Stephanie Nicolo, who helped students curate the show.

Ms. Nicolo said she was inspired to see the students from three of the four participating schools come out the previous Friday to collaborate on the installation, taking their cues on how to prepare the artwork for installation, how to design a show, and hang as much as possible on the walls themselves.

"To the 55+ artists in this room, this is to celebrate you. This is my biggest heartfelt thank you and congratulations for your participation in this exhibition because, if you don't participate, it doesn't exist," said Ms. Nicolo. "This show is a catalyst of conversation in the community. We have so many conversation topics and themes to talk about through each individual piece of artwork. There's over 100 pieces, and that's a lot of good conversation.

"[The galleries] are filled with important voices, your voices, and your stories. May you take these experiences further into your post-secondary adventures wherever they may lead you and continue those engaged conversations, whether it be through the photography, whether it be through the painting, but please continue these experiences and don't forget your voice is important, we need to hear it, we need to see it, so please celebrate and enjoy."