

Aurora's graduates to jointly show their artistic flair



By Brock Weir

Students were back at their desks this week after a nice, relaxing holiday break, but many of the teens eager to graduate this year, might have headed straight for the art studio.

Over 60 Grade 12 art students from all four of Aurora's high schools are now hard at work putting the finishing touches on their final art pieces, which will soon be in full public view in a student-curated art show hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The Aurora Cultural Centre traditionally starts the New Year off with a series of small art shows curated by each of the area high schools that are up for a limited time. This year, however, they decided to go big in the first ever show featuring the collected works of upcoming grads from Aurora High School, Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School for the entire month of February.

"The Centre is super pumped!" says Stephanie Nicolo of the Cultural Centre. "It is not an exaggeration. We tend to find this show brings a lot more excitement than others because there is a certain growth, innocence and vulnerability within the artists and they allow themselves to open up and it is so refreshing. We loved it being in January to start off that year with that fresh experience, but we are even more excited to bring it forward for a full month in February."

While the Centre might be "super pumped", the student curators have turned the excitement up to eleven.

Natalia Morales Caceres, for instance, has been down this road before. The Grade 12 student at St. Max was thrilled when her elder sister exhibited in their school's very first exhibition at the Centre, and when the opportunity came to follow in her footsteps, she jumped at it.

"Seeing that when I was in Grade 9 was the coolest experience ever and now knowing that I get to be a part of it when I am graduating is the best feeling in the world," says Natalia. "I am excited to become a curator and represent my community."

Sylvana Awida had a similar experience when she started Grade Nine at Aurora High School.

"There was an assignment for us to come [to the Aurora Cultural Centre], look at their artwork and pick our favourites," she says.

"This year, when Stephanie came to our school and talked about being able to set it up, and not just making art for the event, I was really interested."

So was Hayley Badner, who is one of the student curators hailing from Williams. Over her time at Williams, Hayley says she has seen the high school become one of the smaller ones in Aurora in terms of student body, so, in the grand scheme of things, they have a smaller representation in the arts.

"I just thought it was an awesome opportunity to have my art in a professional setting," says Hayley. "My art is based around the thought of fertility, mainly pregnancy and children. One of my pieces is father's hand with the baby's hand on top of his. They are slightly off proportion because I wanted to emphasize that the child is small and vulnerable. My second piece is a pregnant woman sitting naked beside a fireplace and just seeing that glow on her stomach. I think pregnant women are really beautiful. It is hard to explain, but I just love it."

This trio of young women are just three members of a much larger group of student curators - the Youth Curator Committee -

working diligently to make this happen. As they see the work from their fellow artists start to roll in, they are noticing emerging themes of social justice, the environment and mental health. But, there is a theme that unites this particular trio: the human form. ?One common element all of my pieces share is there is a lot on femininity and the female form,? says Natalia. ?It is something I feel inspires my art.?

Adds Sylvana: ?My artwork is mainly directed towards the fashion industry and the human body. I hope to get into fashion design and that is why I like to sketch those things and maybe make a wearable art piece. But, I also like to draw the human body in its nude form and get into the muscle and bone structure. In my classroom, I am seeing a lot of artwork where the story behind it is the artist discovering themselves and you can even see our work from Grade Nine to Grade 12 is completely different, where we're going and our own different paths. Lots of people have done self-portraits with different people in the background that describe them or show the process of them discovering themselves.?

The inaugural Youth ARTS Exhibition debuts at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Saturday, February 4, running through March 4.