

Bell Box Mural project to be 'permanent reminder' of land's past, present and future

A few brush strokes can transform an object from something that is purely functional into a beautiful work of art.

But, here in Aurora, brushstrokes have come together to not only add splashes of colour across the community, but spark lasting conversations on the road to Reconciliation.

With the paint dry and the brushes packed away, the Aurora Cultural Centre formally dedicated eight new Bell Box Murals, which acted as a canvas for artistic dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

The finished works can be found in just about every ward within Aurora and each depict unique themes of cultural exchange, commonalities and more.

'This project is a response to Call to Action #83, which encourages the support of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists working collaboratively to produce works that contribute to the Reconciliation process,' said Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre, at the project's formal launch on October 14.

The Calls to Action are a central recommendation from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's report.

'The actual painting was the climax of a long process of collaboration,' Jones continued. 'Artists met in person, over Zoom, and sometimes only through email prior to actually painting together. They engaged in a form of conversation, exchanged stories, knowledge, and traditions from each of their own backgrounds while interpreting the theme they were assigned. Some partnerships, there was the simple act of telling and listening.'

'Storytelling and active listening are key to reconciliation efforts. Each painting that you see across Town is the result of a cross-cultural understanding of the artist to each other, symbolized through the power of art. Each piece is assigned a collaboration and for some the development of a beautiful new friendship. The common presence of Indigenous artwork in our community will serve as a permanent reminder to Aurorans of a historical background of land and the original peoples who continue to live and thrive here today.'

A key member of the project team was Charlene Wong, who has worked in occupational therapy for the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe with a focus on how art can have a profound impact on individuals.

'I have been working in mental health as an occupational therapist for over 10 years and it's amazing all the time to see things come to fruition,' said Wong. 'I couldn't in my wildest dreams imagine this happening. In that time, I have spent much of my time working and connecting with people facing difficult periods with their mental health with activities that they once loved or that they may have actually grown to love. The thing that I have learned the most is that many activities have more meanings than meet the eye. I feel that this is especially true of art. It's more than something to do, it's something to create. It's a place where we can find joy?it's a safe space to make mistakes, to learn and grow. It's a chance to take risks. It's a way to create images and communicate when there's no words that can ever be found. It's an opportunity to reach in and share one's soul, and be vulnerable and courageous.'

'I believe through everyone's actions and work together here? this is an opportunity for us to reconnect, to collaborate with one another, in the joy of our community. Hopefully it's a start towards reflection and increased understandings, friendships, and hearing voices we may not have heard much from in the past. May we continue to raise and hear these voices here.'

For more information about the Aurora Cultural Centre's Bell Box Murals project, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

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