

Black female entrepreneurs celebrated in new Royal Rose exhibition: 'Unspoken Words' is new show by artist Chika Oh

Words can tell a story, but artist Chika Oh is a firm believer that a picture can say 1,000 words.

The Nigerian-born Toronto-based artist has always found it easier to express herself through a visual medium, and she's letting her brush and canvas do the talking in 'Unspoken Words', a new solo exhibition that opens at Aurora's Royal Rose Gallery this Thursday, February 5.

Unspoken Words brings together original canvases 'exploring memory, silence, and embodied truth,' showcasing leading Black female entrepreneurs, just in time for Black History Month.

'The inspiration is really the women,' Oh tells The Auroran. 'There's a lot of different layers I'm playing with in textures, layers and portraiture, so when I meet someone in real life and I'm experiencing them, the colours represent the texture, the layers and the depths of the individual.'

'It was extremely intentional that I chose entrepreneurs and women. There are so many different layers of being a woman. Oftentimes women are mothers, entrepreneurs, pillars of the family, so all of those complexities and the depth of each of those positions they hold, that's what I was trying to translate onto the canvas.'

The medium of paint and canvas was also very intentional.

Oh says that visual art is her language, noting that she can 'get a lot more meaning' out of her art rather than, for instance, writing an essay on the same subject.

'The canvas has all of the words that I am not able to communicate, that I'm not able to say,' she says. 'This is just my interpretation [of my subject] the best way I can, understanding that it's never going to be perfect, but at the same time, [engagement] doesn't just stop at the canvas; it actually continues when the viewer sees the canvas. The story continues. When the viewer is inspired or connects with the canvas, that is an extension as well, just like when we meet people. We're inspired by the different stories, whether it's resilience, whether it's triumph, whether it's Black history, whatever they're inspired by. Capturing that on canvas is the best way that I was able to do that. It's never really finished, it's never really done, but it's a story that continues to grow.'

The solo exhibition, she adds, is a 'legacy-building' event that she's designed to break down barriers, move forward, and 'bring what I have to offer to the community.'

'I was very excited for the opportunity to do so in a way that is well outside my comfort zone and outside of the studio,' says Oh. 'Our story is like unspoken resilience, that creativity that we, the representation that we want to have - just showcasing that in a physical manifestation of the canvases outside of ourselves so that we can see it and then, also, others can engage and connect with that.'

'Unspoken Words' opens at the Royal Rose Gallery, located on the west side of Yonge Street, just south of Wellington Street, in Aurora's downtown core, on Thursday, February 5, from 6 - 9 p.m.

The event will feature words from Oh, as well as spoken word artist Rita Cahil.

By Brock Weir
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