

## Botanica looks at the life force in nature ? and humans



By Brock Weir

Tree branches are gnarled, bare reminders of seasons past, but spring is in the air. Soon each trunk, stem and twig will erupt in new buds, new growth, ready to give again.

You might dismiss them during the barren winter months, overlooking their beauty and what they have to offer and this, in the eyes of artist Julia Hacker, is just one of the many intersections of flora and fauna.

On Friday, the Aurora Cultural Centre formally opened Botanica, an exhibition of new works by the North York-based artist which ?speak to the life cycle, daily medications of growth and discovery.?

Inspired by the world around her, Ms. Hacker says the root of the project can be found in ?very simple, almost mundane? things ? but only on the surface.

?I realised in life there are no mundane things; they might look a little bit that way on the surface, but they're not,? she says. ?One day I was walking my dog and it was a very grey day in the late fall. There was no beautiful foliage, no flowers, bare branches, just nakedness in nature. But, I was struck that all of this ugliness is what holds life and nature. If you don't have a trunk, if you don't have a branch, new flowers will never come and I thought that was the same with personalities.

?When you have a trunk ? the character inside you ? you are then able to dress yourself up, get a new lease on life. Then it matures, brings late blooms and fades. Then, the next season comes again, and there is this endless idea of rebranding yourself. I saw that we get it from nature and I realised how we're really so connected. We have to learn how to sustain the harsh winter in life, in a relationship or a financial situation. As long as you're there, as long as you're strong, good things will come back. It gives me a lot of positivity.?

A fashion designer by training, Ms. Hacker describes her artistic style and themes as ?contemporary impressionism,? along with ?paintings of nature and the feminine mystique.? That ?and? is very important. It certainly isn't an ?or.?

?You are conditioned to think in your life as a woman you're only feminine and attractive in your young years,? she explains. ?I realised that is so not true. Even if you look in nature, you're not just attracted to the brand new flowers. Look at the dandelion when it just pops up. It is yellow and bright, and one way or another you're drawn to it. It doesn't matter if you're irritated, but it is bright and beautiful to look at. It's the same with a youthful woman; she is so pleasing to the eye, so lovely, and when the dandelion gets to the mature stage, it's all white, puffy and fragile.

?When a woman matures, we have more wisdom but there is this fragility. What's more attractive? The beautiful flower that might be dingy in our eyes, or the wonderful white globe of the mature dandelion? The life of a flower is so short and you might think that's it, that's our life as a woman. We mature and then life is over. But you can't always get rid of the dandelion. We're always coming back, trying to make points, saying to people around us, ?I'm still here, I'm still valuable in my way of life, in my femininity, my wisdom and my different angles.?

Now on through May 5, Botanica showcases abstracted botanical life on large canvases. ?Magically,? says the Cultural Centre,

?bright oils and metallic mixed media combine to create inspirational pieces that speak to the life cycle and daily meditations of growth and discovery.?

These discoveries can be made anywhere you look and Ms. Hacker says she hopes her paintings inspire people to take a second look at ?very familiar surroundings? and ?see the beauty that is right there in front of them.?

?Sometimes you can't appreciate what is right there in front of you,? she says. Life is so beautiful. When you look at nature and every attractive curve of the branch is a hidden power and force for life and it just takes time to awaken it. I want people to understand the positivity of life itself. I am interested in the twists of the branches, the twists in strength. They are like blood vessels, pulsating with energy and life. It is inside each of us. We just have to look inside.?