

Cultural Centre to give sneak peek of new gallery show at Farmers? Market pop-up



Visitors to the Aurora Farmers' Market this Saturday will have the opportunity to see a master at work as the Aurora Cultural Centre hosts artist Rose Zhao in a pop-up exhibition ahead of her gallery show.

The work of Zhao, 88, forms the basis of *From Rocks to Brushstrokes*, which runs in the Cultural Centre's Great Hall Gallery from July 31 through October 30. The show, as the name might suggest, charts Zhao's work as she turned to visual art after a long career as a geologist in China before she emigrated to Toronto, and eventually Aurora.

The Centre says Zhao ?finds beauty in all corners of the natural world ? the rocks and soil of the earth, flowers, plants and animals, her granddaughter's pet chicken, the deer outside her daughter's house?? and Market patrons will get to see what sparks her creativity at Town Park on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Zhao and the Cultural Centre first connected at the Town of Aurora's Multicultural Festival back in 2023 and Gallery Manager Samantha Jones says the Centre loves how Zhao ?embraces her culture within the context of Canada.?

?We hadn't seen any submissions before come in where a traditional Chinese practice was being used as well as also being displayed because all of her paintings are displayed on the traditional scrolls, which is a really meticulous process and you'll see that in the exhibition,? says Jones of Zhao's first display at the Centre, which came as one of several participating artists in their show *Perennial Darkness*. ?We thought it was so unique, especially for the Cultural Centre.?

By the time it came to curate a solo show, it may have been a tall task as Zhao is estimated to have completed more than 300 works over the years. The resulting 75 works that will be on show is the result of several studio visits where the artist arranged her works in four different groups, from which five to 20 works were selected from each.

?We want to show the wide breadth of her practice, but at the same time we want to show her journey coming from China and then coming to the States, because that's where her family had moved, and then coming to Toronto and furthermore to Aurora,? says Jones. ?We have a focus on artworks sort of documenting that journey. We see works that were created in Beijing, we also see

works that were created in New Jersey and New York where her family had been temporarily, and then we also have work that was done more recently in Aurora.

?You can see her evolution of practice, but also her evolution just in the last few years of transitioning to North America and how that affected her personality and her practice.?

One of her practices, shares Jones, is a sheer love of painting in front of people, which is where the idea for the Aurora Farmers' Market pop-up came from.

?She likes to show the materials she uses and also the amount of work that goes into the practice.?

says Jones. ?We decided that the best way to really give our audiences an understanding of what goes into her painting practice is just to watch her at work. Art isn't meant to be just confined onto walls. I think we need to normalize the practice of doing art more in public. It's not meant to be something that you do by yourself, and I think there's this idea that an artist is supposed to be a recluse, that they're in their studio and then they show in galleries, and that's it.

?We're in a time right now, I think, where we're still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and we're still craving socialization and I think more than ever we need to see art done outdoors and the liveliness outdoors to keep bringing people out, just cherishing being around other people and doing hobbies around other people ? and it will inspire people to do their own thing as well, especially in Aurora where we have a large and growing Asian population. We want those residents to see at the Aurora Cultural Centre we're showing art that's being done all around the world. We have such a diverse population and we want our residents to see that in our programming.?

For more on Rose Zhao's From Rocks to Brushstrokes: A Geologist's Artistic Transformation, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca/from-rocks-to-brushstrokes.

By Brock Weir