

Cultural Centre's fall and winter show celebrates regeneration and rebirth



As the autumn settles in, trees and plants are shedding the leaves from the season that was and hibernating animals are ready to hunker down until the spring brings about a rebirth.

This is a theme being explored in 'Congruent (by definitions)', a group exhibition on now at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Curated by Adora Lau, the Centre's Gallery Assistant, the six-artist show explores harmony in nature, themes of metamorphosis, and cyclical patterns in nature and life itself.

Lau says she was inspired to spearhead the exhibition after seeing the symbol of the Ouroboros, a serpent constantly eating itself and regenerating itself at the same time.

'It is constantly eating itself and rebirthing itself in a very vicious cycle,' says Lau. '[Gallery Manager Samantha Jones] provided me this wonderful opportunity to put together an exhibition through an open call, so I created this theme and artists came forward with their applications. Each piece has its own very personal interpretation of the theme. We wanted to focus on local artists, emerging artists, and just marginalized communities as well as artists of that background.'

'The narrative of this show is how all these cycles are not self-implemented but imposed upon the artist. They have experienced all that through their lived experiences and in the form of artworks they really harness that cycle that is being imposed on them and by making artwork they are retelling their story, they are restricting their narrative, and just reshaping their own story. It is bringing power to them as well.'

One of the artists sharing her own story and perception is Vishwa Patel, an artist based in Etobicoke. Patel says she was drawn to the exhibition as it looked at a 'very philosophical theme' and, to answer the call, she drew upon her Hindu heritage.

'I follow Hinduism where we believe in reincarnation and that ties into the exhibition theme very strongly,' she reflects. 'I started thinking about how do I visualize and showcase reincarnation in a way that would appeal to people who are not of the faith or are not very familiar with it.'

In 'Samsara,' Patel, who is represented in the show alongside artists Amanda Blake, Phoebe Chen, Judith Livingston, Christina Margaretha, and Susan Wood, looked at the theme through the lens of a turtle, which Hindus believe to be the basis that holds up the universe.

“Inside [the turtle shape] I wanted to show boxes, each representing 420,000 lives. They all add up to 8.4 million, which in Hinduism, we believe each person goes through 8.4 million births before going through a human birth again. If viewers wanted to go a more scientific way or less of a spiritual way, there's about 8.4 million [species] in the world. It shows how the human body or the human atoms? deconstruct, reconstruct and they take on other forms of the universe.

“The other piece follows Hindu belief and in the Hindu belief we believe there are five elements for the human body: earth, water, fire, air and space. It shows, similarly to the other piece, how atoms and how the body and all the molecules in the universe are recycled and how everything connects to these elements and how they are never changing but the body and all the elements are recycled over and over again.”

As she looked over the other works in the show, Patel says she was struck at how many artists interpreted the theme with an eye to nature? “it just feels like the basis for everyone's creation ties into nature?” and the result was “so harmonious,” despite each person's interpretation of rebirth.

“The circles appear across so many different cultural backgrounds and histories,” says Gallery Manager Samantha Jones. “There's the circle of life, and just everything in nature is cyclical. As we get into the fall and winter season, we're reminded of the cycle we go through every year and this is a very seasonal show for that reason. We see things move on, but we're going to see them come back again in the spring.”

While the show closes in the depths of winter on January 18, events related to this exhibition will warm the hearts and minds of art-lovers.

This Saturday, November 9, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Aurora Cultural Centre will host an artist-poet gathering to “create spontaneous written and visual responses” to the artworks on display. This event is free with registration online at auroraculturalcentre.ca.

Two “Exhibition Walk & Talks” are set for Saturday, December 7, with an afternoon of interactive attractions.

By Brock Weir