

Fool's Gold exhibition looks into the life of the humble goldfish and their big eco impacts



A goldfish can be a perfect starter pet, but what happens when the lustre wears off?

Mother Nature may take her course, resulting in a euphemistic 'burial at sea' staged in the bathroom, they may be returned to the pet store, or, unfortunately, dumped live into our bodies of water, allowing it to unintentionally wreak havoc on their new ecosystems.

A new exhibition, Fool's Gold, featuring the work of Laura Fedynyszyn, tackles this very subject, using eye-catching and uniquely-designed goldfish to encourage viewers to take a closer look at a difficult subject.

'Fool's Gold features linocut prints of the common pet goldfish alongside various fish species native to Ontario,' says the Aurora Cultural Centre, on the installation now on at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) through August 21. 'For decades, pet goldfish have been released into the wild by owners who no longer wish to keep them. Though the action is well-intentioned, it has harmful repercussions for Ontario's aquatic ecosystems. A highly adaptive species, goldfish populations can thrive in local waters, but in doing so, they threaten native plants and animals.

'Formed into a large school, the work speaks to the direct and severe impact this phenomenon has on Ontario's aquatic ecosystems in the present time. The issue is particularly prevalent in Aurora, with numerous sightings of goldfish reported and documented.'

This is the second exhibition to be hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre at the AFLC due to their temporary displacement from the Church Street School for the duration of the Aurora Town Square redevelopment project.

'Due to the success of our first installation at the AFLC with (Metis artist) Tracey-Mae Chambers, we decided it was something we wanted to continue while we were offsite,' says Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre. 'We put a call out to anyone who would like to apply for proposals.'

When the Centre received Fedynyszyn's proposal, Jones says it was clear from the outset it was clear the artist had done their homework when it came to the issues facing Aurora and the surrounding community.

'In her statement and her proposal, she brought attention to the fact that there were multiple sightings around Aurora and our neighbouring regions of goldfish, which is obviously an unusual occurrence and it would be due to human intervention,' says Jones, noting it was a perfect choice for the AFLC's foyer space as thousands of families come through the Complex each year that just might have a goldfish of their own at home.

'It brings that issue [of re-homing] to attention and provides some thoughts of alternative measures for rehoming their fish if they don't want them anymore,' Jones continues. 'People are really awestruck by the colours [as] the artist uses a very bright orange for

the goldfish and interweaves it into depictions of native fish species that are also in the installation. The very interesting gradation effect really sucks people in. I think people are first awestruck by the beauty of it and then are enticed to learn more based on the signs we have put up.

?Laura Fedynyszyn really researched a lot about Aurora for this project. She is really like a visiting artist and researcher of Aurora and neighbouring communities. She is very interested in invasive species. This isn't the first work where she's focused on invasive species and what's nice is she doesn't just focus on the invasive species ? it's not the goldfish's fault it's in a storm pond; she focuses on the human responsibility towards causing a species to be invasive in our ecosystems.?

Laura Fedynyszyn is a printmaker from Toronto. She completed her BFA in the OCAD University Printmaking Program and went on to study Art Conservation at Fleming College. Her artistic practice blends these two fields of study through reuse and reimagining of old materials, with themes related to nature conservancy and climate change.

For more about Fool's Gold, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca/fools-gold.

By Brock Weir