

Future grads train their creative eyes on the world ahead of Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art



It can be a rough world out there, and we need a lot more joy in our lives.

This is the view of Claire Thorne, a Grade 12 student at Aurora's St. Anne's School.

A passionate artist, finding joy in the world around her and expressing it through her work has been a key focus as she finishes up her last year at St. Anne's and it's that joy she hopes to spread to the wider community as one of more than 60 local Grade 12 students set to take over the Aurora Cultural Centre later this month as part of the annual Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art. (MCOYA)

Participating students are in the process of putting the finishing touches on their work before curating and installing their pieces at the Centre on January 30 in what promises to be the largest and widest-reaching MCOYA yet. This year's show is bringing together 191 pieces of art created by 61 students.

There's a lot of very personal projects, but it's really diverse in the way they're expressing it this year, says Adora Lau, Gallery Assistant at the Aurora Cultural Centre who is taking the lead on MCOYA once again this year.

This diversity was evident when The Auroran visited St. Anne's to speak with some of their participating art students.

Thorne says the opportunity to exhibit her art in a formal gallery setting for the very first time was too good to miss, and she looks forward to hearing the thoughts her works inspire within viewers.

We need to spread as much joy as we can, says Thorne of what inspires her and helped determine what she wanted to put front and centre in the show. One of my pieces is about me and my mom making Christmas cookies every year, and that quality of time, as well as just saving time to participate in all of your hobbies and thinking about bringing your childhood whimsy into your adult life because it can be really depressing. Then it's kind of melancholy looking back on it when it shouldn't be. It should be something you should integrate into your life in a positive matter.

Joy is a feeling Thorne says she discovers in the creative process, finding it calming when there isn't too much pressure around it.

Similarly, fellow student Zara Martin says she's found the power in art to foster empathy, particularly when training her artistic lens on today's social issues.

I think that empathy is a really important theme that art can help with, says Martin, pointing to a painting she completed inspired

by Picasso's Guernica, interpreted as a meditation on war and violence.

‘Art is vulnerable,’ she says. ‘Having this experience [in MCOYA] is going to be really interesting, being able to see other people looking at my art and the different perspectives that can come from that.’

Lindsay Fu is also looking forward to that ‘connection’ having her work publicly displayed for the first time will foster, particularly with her artistic peers around York Region.

Fu says among the themes that inspired her work for this year's exhibition include professionalism and the social constructs related to that.

‘I kind of use my art to bring about the absurdity,’ she says, pointing to a painting of a girl on a toilet with a chuckle. ‘It's kind of funny when we're expected to not talk about certain subjects. I use my art in a satirical way, too. I'm exploring how [through] fashion, you can see how someone's expressing themselves and going against the societal norms. The way we dress, I feel it's really confined sometimes and you can't dress in certain ways because it's not professional or it's not seen as good, but sometimes with what you wear can also go against societal norms.’

Similar themes are also being explored by Bettina Zeng who says she ‘takes a lot of inspiration’ from the media she consumes, including TikTok.

‘What I tend to focus on is very metaphysic themes as well as societal themes, whether it's social injustice?’ and I submitted a piece on the over-sexualization of women in media. It's just a broad range. I feel like my pieces are introspective and reflective as well. I just feel like [it's important] to question the world, to look below the surface level, and to really question everything you've consumed and you surround yourself with.’

For art teacher Miranda Ly, the chance for her students to participate in MCOYA was important because ‘being able to exhibit art and to show it to a public audience is one of the joys of making art.’

Artists, she says, can sometimes be insular, and it is a ‘really great opportunity’ for students to share something so personal ‘in a safe space like the Aurora Cultural Centre.’

‘I'm super-proud of them,’ says Ly. ‘I think they've really put a lot of time, effort and thought into the work they create. With this program, I'm just trying to make it so it's a safe space for them to grow, try things, see how they go, and if they run into difficulties, be able to navigate those because I think that's one of the skills that we really need.’

Lau anticipates nothing but smooth waters ahead as students put the finishing touches on their pieces.

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art opens at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday, February 6, with an opening reception from 6.30 - 8.30 p.m., and running through April 19.

For more information, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

By Brock Weir
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