

## Gallery show provides art grads with a great cap to high school



**By Brock Weir**

Tackling racism, body image, and environmental concerns, Aurora students are letting their art do the talking as they take on real world issues in a show unifying the talents of local high schools.

Artists, their families, teachers, and members of the public at large flooded the Aurora Cultural Centre last Wednesday for the formal opening of the Youth ARTS Exhibition.

Bringing together the work of nearly 65 artists from Aurora High School, Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School and St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, the show features art from just about every media tackling themes both personal and wide-reaching.

For the students, it is a culmination of a year's worth of work. For the Aurora Cultural Centre, it is a new spin on a Centre tradition. In past years, the Centre has provided the space for gallery shows for the individual schools. This year, however, was the inaugural group effort, spearheaded by an enthusiastic student curatorial committee.

“After much careful execution, it is my honour to be here tonight speaking on behalf of the curator committee,” said St. Max student Natalia Morales Caceres. “I think I speak for all the artists and curators tonight that we have been looking forward to this since the beginning of the year when we began creating our art. I know for a fact that I myself had the show at the back of my mind with every project I completed. Now that the past semester is over, it is a great accomplishment to see the work my peers, as well as those [at the other schools] have created.

“Three years ago, I stood as a guest in the audience looking at the art my sister and her peers had made in the first [St. Max] Collection ever. Now, I am fortunate enough to be involved with the fourth Collection with the most amazing group of artists I have ever met. To see the art on these walls, many of which are far beyond my creative capacity, is astounding to me as an artist. It means so much to be standing here in front of the people who inspire me the most.”

The February 4 opening attracted a host of local dignitaries, including Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, Mayor Geoff Dawe, and representatives from the offices of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev and Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson.

“I think I say the same thing year in and year out touring the artwork on the walls ? every year I am so impressed ? the talent is unbelievable,” said Mr. Ballard. “The second thing I say every year is I feel so inadequate with my art skills, quite frankly. I will never, ever get to the level we have here tonight. I want to congratulate the young folks here who are exhibiting in this professional gallery and thank them for their interest and passion in art, and for coming here tonight.

“I want to thank the parents for supporting their children in the pursuit of art. In my mind, it is an exceptionally important endeavour in our world. There is a saying that goes something along the lines of: science makes life possible, art makes life worthwhile, and I think that is evident here tonight.”

Mayor Dawe added that each time he comes to an opening like this, he is more impressed than the year before.

“The talent that is exhibited is phenomenal,” said Mayor Dawe, noting the themes in the art seemed a bit “lighter” than in previous shows. “It is such a pleasure to be able to welcome the students and it is great we now have four schools here. The amount of work the students, parents, teachers and other volunteers have put in is spectacular. It really is a treat to come in and see the different types of art and the different expressions you come with. Every year is so dramatically different.”

The Youth ARTS Exhibition runs at the Aurora Cultural Centre through March 4.