

Grade 12 students express themselves through Celebration of Youth Arts



Delayed due to weather, the belated grand opening reception for the 2024 Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre, was no less warm on Thursday night as Grade 12 students welcomed family, friends and peers to see their work at Town Hall.

Now in its 13th year, the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts (MCOYA), has grown by leaps and bounds since its inception.

This year's gallery show features the work of Grade 12 students from all of Aurora's high schools, as well as Grade 12 students who live in Aurora but go to school elsewhere.

"I feel like it is so important to get to show youth art, especially those who might not get a chance to, if they are not going into art but they enjoy it as a passion," says student-artist Jem Mabee, whose vivid work dominates one wall of the Centre's temporary gallery space at Town Hall.

Mabee, who aspires to study art and special education in their post-secondary career, added: "I feel it is so important to show how creative youth art is to other people. I have met so many people through this event that are also artists the same age as me, so it is really good to show all the different styles."

Indeed, the 2024 Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts features just about every style and media of art, ranging from pencil crayon to oils, from sculpture to photography and digital.

"The visual arts and, for that matter, all forms of art and culture are one of the bedrocks of our community," said Mayor Tom Mrakas, who attended the reception alongside Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy and MPP Michael Parsa. "The arts bring people together. They help us better understand our society and they give people an important outlet for self-expression. They can also play a powerful role in shaping larger society, becoming part of political and cultural movements that change societies forever."

"I know so many of you are graduating high school this year? and exploring new educational and work opportunities. Regardless of what you end up doing, regardless of whether you become a professional artist or not, I hope you all keep creating, I hope you keep learning and finding new ways to express yourself through art. Whether it is visual art, spoken word, writing, or whatever it is, I encourage you all to take risks and do the things that are different, and maybe even sometimes uncomfortable."

Added Cheryl Shindruk, Executive Vice President of Geranium Homes, which once again sponsored this year's MCOYA: "We are always amazed at the diverse array of talent and work and exceptional pieces that are showcased in this exhibition. It really takes our breath away. We hope you are proud of your remarkable accomplishments, as you all should be."

These sentiments were music to the ears of Samantha Jones, the Aurora Cultural Centre's Gallery Manager, as well as Gallery Assistant Adora Lau.

Jones, who exhibited in the MCOYA more than a decade ago, said what started as a "small gathering of students from just one school" is now a show that encompasses 101 works of art created by 55 students from five schools and beyond.

"We express deep gratitude to the students who show their work with us and the teachers who year after year encourage them through the process," said Jones, noting that "Art Bytes" will expand ways to enjoy the exhibition online.

Added Lau: "While MCOYA might follow a similar approach every year, it never fails to feel fresh and distinctive. MCOYA 2024 is no different. Every featured artwork delivers a wide range of tones from wholesome appreciation of close loved ones to artwork which delves into mental illness and ongoing political crises."

"The variety of tones that reflect all of your interests is what makes MCOYA so unique for every visitor," Lau continued. "To every participating student, each artwork you exhibit here holds a small piece of yourself that strongly reflects your personal growth, pride, and hard work that is a culmination of your secondary school years. I am deeply thankful and honoured to be entrusted in your artwork and this chance to work alongside you in this exhibition."

The 2024 Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts continues through April 20, with the online gallery available through May 17. Gallery hours are Monday through Saturday from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., at the Cultural Centre's temporary gallery space on the second floor of Town Hall. For more information, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

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