

## Graduating artists will have more opportunities than ever to share vision at MCOYA



Grade 12 students return to classrooms this week looking ahead to making the mark for whatever life has in store for them after high school. For graduating art students, however, they're also putting the finishing touches on what they want to convey to the community about themselves and the world they live in ahead of the 2024 Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art.

Hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre each year and sponsored by Geranium Homes, the annual Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art (MCOYA) is a chance for graduating art students at all of Aurora's secondary schools to come together to showcase their work in a professionally-curated setting.

And 2024 is a year of growth for MCOYA as this year's crop of participating students will have more opportunities than ever before for them to showcase their work.

“This year, we're adding an online profile for each and every student that would like to participate,” says Adora Lau, Gallery Assistant for the Aurora Cultural Centre. “In previous years, artists were limited to showing two artworks or so; they wanted to exhibit more but we had limited space. We're expanding their profiles to show up to a total of four artworks, allowing them a little more traction for people who aren't able to visit the gallery in person. From my own personal experience graduating from art school, I had to make my own online profile and this is a good way to prepare anyone who is going into art school after high school as well.”

Also being inaugurated this year is an After School Art Program running every Thursday after the exhibition formally opens on February 22 from 4.30 - 6.30 p.m.

Lau says this is a “low-pressure studio space” outside of school or work, “a place of neutrality”, for up-and-coming artists to create.

“It is a place of making community and building relationships,” says Lau, noting that she and Gallery Manager Samantha Jones have noticed what they say is a lack of such spaces for youth in the community. “We're really trying to push this forward in high schools; these are places like community centres, parks and malls, but a lot of these places will allow you to spend money and really be in constant motion. Being in a consistent place at a consistent time allows them to build on the stronger community within art and meet others as well.”

While the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art has showcased young artists for more than a decade, this year will be the first to feature works from Grade 12 artists at ESC Renaissance, the French-Catholic school on the northeast corner of Bloomington Road and Bathurst Street.

This inaugural group of Renaissance students is eager to show the community their passion for art and the things that inspire them.

"For me, art is more than just a passion; it is something I want to share with others," says Romy Barakat. "When I do an art piece, what goes into it is something I want others to criticize, whether it be good criticism or bad criticism. Every critique is important to me and I want to share with the world what I am capable of doing."

"I have prepared a variety of art pieces from graphite paintings to just a mix of everything to represent my culture and identity," Romy adds, noting her Lebanese heritage. "I explored a lot of my culture and my roots, whether it be drawing architectural buildings or pieces that is just for art ? art pieces because it is beautiful. Whenever I have an opportunity to show the world where I am from, what we're capable of, whether it is in the arts or food, it inspires me a lot."

"Whenever I finish an art piece, the first thing I want to do is hang it up in the school because our teacher has a wall where we display all our art pieces. I always want to display my work to show others, of course, what I am capable of and how art can not only be something that is beautiful, it can also be therapeutic. I use art as a form of therapy; whenever I am feeling down, I can just grab a pencil, take my sketchbook, look at something? and make something amazing out of it. I want to show others that passion of mine."

Classmate Elise Mazzawi is also of Lebanese heritage and she says MCOYA is "a good opportunity to build on your knowledge and meet other people."

"It's nice to show what the future is capable of," she says, noting that one of the centrepieces of her submissions is a large-scale "art-to-wear" project featuring a six-foot-tall mannequin modelling the art itself. "I like to incorporate subtle messages in my art. My generation, we like to consume everything ?but it is a problem because we're willing to spend so much on things that are not important. I also like to talk about Global Warming. I know it is kind of basic, but it affects our generation especially because we're growing up with this terrible problem and we don't know what to do. It is a great way to look at what you're presenting in a fun and creative way."

Architecture is both an artistic inspiration and a career goal for Elise, as is the case of Elora Aube, who is also looking forward to connecting with art-lovers and members of the general public alike through MCOYA.

"I never really show people my art, so I feel this will be the first time I will be able to show to a public audience more than just my family," she says. "I am of mixed culture ? half Chinese and half French ? and I like to incorporate my Chinese culture as much as possible. It is a side of me I don't connect with a lot because I go to a French school and I see a lot of French things all the time. I work a lot with acrylic and pencil ? those are my favourite media ? so I will be displaying a lot of that because I feel like with paint I can do the creative aspect of abstract and not necessarily conventional; pencil is more realism so it displays different ways of how to express my art."

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts will unfold in the Aurora Cultural Centre's temporary gallery space at Town Hall from Saturday, February 10 to Saturday, April 20, with an opening reception set for Thursday, February 15 from 6.30 ? 8.30 p.m. For more information, visit [auroraculturalcentre.ca](http://auroraculturalcentre.ca).

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