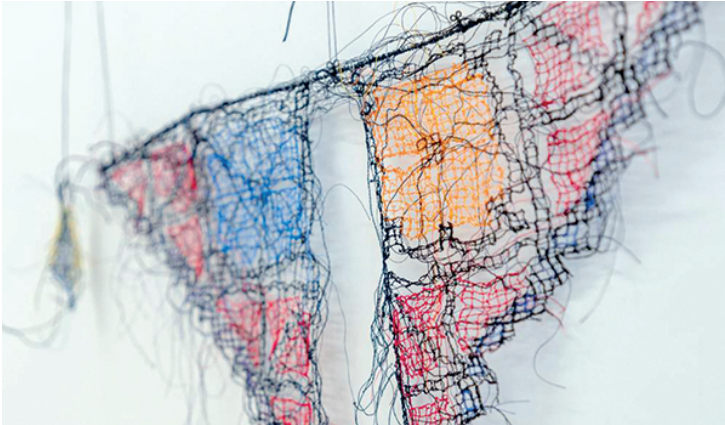


Illusions of Separation offers immersive experience, food for thought at Cultural Centre



As an artist, Samar Hejazi works with fabric, light and shadow to create works that are constantly transforming right before our eyes. They're not normally artworks that lend themselves well to what she describes as 'rigid' spaces, but the opportunity to create an immersive experience in just one such local space gave the artist a new and fresh challenge.

The results are 'Illusions of Separation,' an immersive art installation at the Aurora Cultural Centre's temporary gallery space in Town Hall.

Based in Dubai and Toronto, the artist uses her medium to challenge ideas of boundaries in the personal and global context.

Using traditional Palestinian textile work, she's fascinated by each stitch and thread - what she describes as the 'structural system' of the fabric.

'But I start taking it apart to find different ways to exist,' Hejazi tells The Auroran. 'I was drawn to it because it represented this structure and rigidity. It was cultural for me, and from there I take it apart to see how these things can exist. My idea initially was that as Palestinian people, the land is taken away or the culture is told through a narrative. It's very ephemeral in a lot of ways and built up. I wanted to see how I could represent the Palestinian cultural identity in a way that exists through the material.'

'If there's no land for the people, do the people still exist? How do I show that in my work? The fabric represented the land and the embroidery would be the people, so I took off the fabric and saw that [the embroidery] it still held itself and I liked that analogy.'

The question was, what is the boundary of the work? How does somebody define it?

'When I make my work, I have to let go of any control over the way the work is perceived because I don't have any control over that. Everyone has their context and history. I try not to think about what I want them to leave with because as long as they leave with an experience.'

This is exactly the kind of experience Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre, wanted in the first exhibition and art installation she has been able to build from the ground up since first joining the Cultural Centre team.

'When I first started in the Aurora Town Hall space, I knew it was a challenging space,' says Jones. 'I think there's a lot of hesitancy from the public in going to shows at the space because it looks like there is only so much you can do. It's a typical government building, but I saw it as a challenge and I wanted to find an artist who could really get creative with it and that kind of

artist you need is an installation artist.

?We talked for a year and she came to install the show straight from Dubai to here and she's actually exhibiting work that hadn't been on Canadian soil before. We have these amazing creations that are straight from her studio in Dubai that are amazing and beautiful. Another thing is we created this show together entirely through the digital world. I actually had never seen her work, I had only seen it online up until a few weeks ago. This is a show that has been developed completely online and myself included I only saw it for the first time a few weeks ago when we installed it.?

The exhibition officially opened in the gallery space with an artist reception at Town Hall on April 1, and while it will be available for members of the public to see in person through April 29, it will continue virtually through the Cultural Centre's website (auroraculturalcentre.ca) through June 3.

In the meantime, Jones says the Centre is offering gallery tours through April 29 for school groups, workplaces and retirement homes who want a day out.

?My reward comes from the making of the work and then the finishing of the work and seeing it installed in a way I am intuitively happy with,? says Hejazi. ?It's not that easy to erase a culture and that's the problem with the definition of a nation, of land, or the definition is what stops us from thinking that we exist, but we exist, so there's no need to fit that definition because it already exists. We get so hooked on the definition of things but we never question who made these definitions and why.?

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