

Italicized showcases Italian-Canadian experience through art



What does your culture mean to you?

Is it a celebration of historic glories and the promise of the future?

Perhaps it's something closer to home, such as a story or a recipe that has been passed down through the generations, nourishing mind and soul.

It's a question that was recently asked of Italian-Canadian artists in the Greater Toronto Area as Aurora's Royal Rose Gallery put the finishing touches on a new exhibition that launched Thursday evening.

Italicized, co-curated by gallery owner Rosa Calabrese and artist Aurora Pagano, brings together works that represent each artist's interpretation of what their culture means to them.

The show, which features everything from textile art to works made out of carefully-placed eggshells, is hosted by the Gallery as part of their ongoing Italian Heritage Month program, which formally kicked off June 2 with a flag-raising ceremony outside the Aurora Public Library.

"We invited Italian-Canadian artists to contribute works that spoke to the idea of what their culture and heritage means to them, or to take an Italian legend, myth, or a certain personality and translate that through modern eyes. What does that mean to you? What does it represent?" explained Pagano of the genesis of Italicized. "In the end, we have 13 artists here. Rosa and I are also contributing artists to the exhibit and they vary in age, demographics, different parts of Italy, so their backgrounds are really what make this collection so interesting and so rich."

Pagano approached her own contributions from two different angles. She wanted to explore passion and heart, "and what we keep and hold onto." Taking the myth and legend theme to heart, she also created works inspired by Dante and his conceptions of heaven and hell in response to "all of the unrest happening in the world, a lot of things that are happening that are maybe ego-based or motivated."

"It's a real struggle to try and maintain a sense of peace, understanding and compassion with everything that is going on," she said.

Calabrese's work is a celebration that uses eggshells as an essential ingredient.

"I work with mixed media, and here it's eggshells on canvas, which are painted over, or I just let the eggshells speak for themselves

in the way they are laid down on the canvas, but the more I look at it in the context of this show, I start to really see my heritage influence in the works that I didn't even realize," she said. "It's visiting Italy, watching my great aunts feed the chickens – food and culture is just such a big part of the tradition."

As they surveyed the works on Thursday evening as guests began arriving for that night's opening reception, Calabrese said that regardless of what heritage one comes from, it's all about the opportunity to learn.

"We're always learning and evolving, so if you're not of an Italian background, maybe you don't know any Italian Canadians, it's a great opportunity to come and experience the culture," she said.

Added Pagano: "I think whenever an artist is talking about family, culture, influence, and iconic people within that culture, it relates to everybody. It doesn't matter what your background is. Hopefully it makes you stop and think about your own culture and your own heritage. How does it affect your thoughts? How does it influence your life today? We all come from the same ancestors, so what do we take from them and bring forward into 2025?"

The Royal Rose Gallery is located on the west side of Yonge Street, just south of Wellington Street.

Italian Heritage Month festivities continue this week with a Food and Wine Tasting hosted Thursday, June 12, by Royal Rose and Aw, Shucks, from 6 – 10 p.m. Limited tickets were available at press time on Tuesday, but can be secured through Eventbrite at www.eventbrite.ca/e/viva-italia-a-month-of-celebration-culture-and-community-tickets-1361648911549.

On Saturday, June 14, the Aurora Soccer Club will host a free exhibition game from 3 – 7 p.m., featuring on-site food trucks, at their facility on Industrial Parkway South.

Rounding out the program is a screening of *The South*, in conjunction with the Aurora Film Circuit, on Monday, June 16, from 6 – 9 p.m.; and on June 19, with an Autori and Amaretti authors event, which will take place at the gallery from 6 – 8 p.m.

For a full schedule and further ticket information, visit royalroseart.ca/our-monthly-calendar.

By Brock Weir