

Keep Pushing Boundaries ? Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts opens at ACC



Grade 12 art students from throughout Aurora were encouraged to keep pushing boundaries as they were joined by local dignitaries, parents, and art lovers at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Friday night for the grand opening of the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts 2026.

On now through April 19, the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts (MCOYA) has brought together more than 200 works produced by more than 65 Grade 12 students from Aurora High School, Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, ESC Renaissance, St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, St. Andrew's College and, for the first time this year, St. Anne's School.

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts was established by the Aurora Cultural Centre in 2011, its second year of operation, and has been a mainstay each year, whether at the Cultural Centre itself, Town Hall during the construction of Aurora Town Square, or virtually during the Global Pandemic.

"Throughout those years, we've seen so many incredible pieces line the walls, at Town Hall, and now here at Town Square. This year, over 200 pieces by more than 65 students will become part of that legacy," said Mayor Tom Mrakas at Friday night's grand opening reception. "I had the opportunity to meet many of these wonderful students last Friday as the artwork was being installed. I'm so encouraged by how smart, talented and thoughtful they are. It gives me great hope for the future, and how extremely honoured and proud I am of the talent right here in Aurora."

Mayor Mrakas was joined at the reception by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, and Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner who each mingled with the students and engaged with them on their work.

"The truth is Aurora really is a Town that values arts and culture, because we know how deeply it enriches our lives," he continued. "Art brings people together. It helps us see the world in new ways. It can challenge us, move us, and even shape society itself. I know many of our students are preparing for the next chapter - graduating, pursuing further education, exploring career opportunities, and I do want to leave you with this: No matter where life takes you, I hope you keep creating. Keep pushing boundaries. Keep using art to express yourself and share your voice with the world."

"To the teachers and parents of these young artists, thank you. Thank you for fostering their creativity and giving them the support that they need to thrive."

These sentiments were echoed by Rossy Bustamente of ROCA Financial Solutions, Sun Life, who was among the event sponsors.

She told students she was a fashion designer by profession before moving into the financial realm, and drew parallels between being an artist and a financial professional.

“Art and finance are ultimately about people. They are about identity, confidence, and possibility. I am deeply passionate about supporting community,” she said. “I began my career when I was 27 years old. And everything I have been able to achieve is thanks to all my mentors and sponsors that supported me along the way.

“Giving back is my way of paying forward. When we support art, we support expression, confidence, and future possibilities, especially for our youth. The Aurora Cultural Centre exists for the community, and it has created this beautiful space where young artists can be seen, heard, and celebrated. That is priceless. We are fortunate to have this venue in our community? I am in the business of helping people build financial stability and confidence in their future, and I see this exhibition as the beginning of that journey for these young artists. Confidence starts when we are able to express who we are, and stability begins when someone believes in our potential. To the students whose work we are celebrating tonight, your creativity matters. Your voice matters. And the courage that it takes to show your work, your art, to the world, it's something to be proud of.”

Artists featured in this year's MCOYA include Cassandra Almeida, Gabrielle Awoyemi, Sophie Baruco, Chloe Bell, Arya Boodhai, Alexis Bowen, Julia Burnett, Xinyu Chen, Ellie Cheng, Tristin Coleman, Sarah Costa-Whitford, Olivia Crescenzi, Alex Daleman, Lauren Dalton, Emma Dench, Becca Duicu, Tristan Dunlap Sanabria, Maggie Elserafy, Meredith Emerson, Neta Erlich, Adalia Fadelli, Arshida Farhadnia, Lindsay Fu, Evangeline Giaprakis, Raha Givehchi, Ava Gray, Jessica Huang, Liza Kaplun, Sally Keita, Rita Konyukhova, Eric Lin, Felix Lu, Oneli Maliduwapathirana, Zara Martin, Hailey Mason, Adaya Mongelli, Tannaz Motamedrad, Nafissa Muller, Maria T. Nardi, Alissa Nicole, Ava Panzini, Sammy Park, Yuna Park, Sienna Pennington, Mirko Privitera, Alyssa Quattrocchi, Owen Shen, Nathan Skrzyniak, Kate Smith, Mikaela Solaryk, Sara Spinola, Hannah Stewart, Claire Thorne, Victoria Tope, Allie Torraville, Lylia Tran, Brigitte Turchiaro, Catherine Wang, Leon Wang, Richard Wang, Aiyane Wong, Maddy Wong, J Murray Xiong, Jason Yip, and Bettina Zeng.

For more information about this year's Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, including upcoming events associated with the show, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca/mcoya26.

By Brock Weir
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