

Last chance to see larger-than-life pop-up from Aurora High students



As the 2024 Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts nears its end at Town Hall, so too does a larger-than-life off-shoot exhibition celebrating the work of past art grads from Aurora High School.

Assignments of Art Class Past, a pop-up exhibition at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, is on display now through April 17.

Here, viewers can view students' larger-than-life takes on every day objects, from a paintbrush to a giant bag of M&M's candies, and so much more, all created by Aurora High School (AHS) students inspired by the work of public art sculptor Claes Oldenburg.

The works of students who have now left AHS have been lovingly curated by Lee-Ann Moore, AHS' Head of Visual Arts, and her colleagues, who kept these masterworks from the trash bin at the end of each school year.

As they have been collected, they've been dusted off to serve as inspiration for the current crop of art students, but this is the first time they have been exhibited for all the public to see.

Oldenburg's idea was to make gigantic sculptures that go in public spaces so that everyone can appreciate art, not just the people who paid a ticket to go into an art gallery or museum. He was trying to liberate art from the confines of time and it should be an everyday experience, says Moore.

With Oldenburg's philosophy, and visual representation through the works of Andy Warhol, who created works centred on everyday objects like the iconic Campbell's soup cans, students were challenged to think of, What is a ubiquitous item of 2024? What are the current brandings or objects that carry weight of importance, maybe just in terms of trending?

They might seem frivolous at first, but perhaps they do have underlying statements, says Moore. One example I received in the past was a baby soother. The part that goes into the mouth was all sorts of newspaper headlines of problems in society and advertising. That is an example of some of the more political-angled sculptures; a lot of kids just want to experiment with materials and working with a scale and they don't necessarily have to have that common social commentary.

It's [about] whatever students gravitate towards. One piece I'm looking at is Pocky, an Asian-style type of candy that comes in a box with sticks, which was done by a recent immigrant who reflected their own pop culture from where they originated from. For the students who picked candy items or games, it sort of represents the fun that they associate with those things. It doesn't have an

underlying current, it is a representation of their escapism, a sense of fun, and just kind of, for the candy, the sugar rush they've imbibed!?

Other students have very much taken a 'found material' approach in flexing their creative muscles with materials they already have on hand or have uncovered or recovered from elsewhere.

They can transform boxes like using cardboard to construct something that is sculptural and complex or just the power of paint and how they apply it, and all the other skills to create details of packaging and things like that. One of the first ones I ever received was a big Skittles and all it is is newsprint bunched up inside a larger sheet of paper, and just to show that there is a volume of Skittles in the centre and on the ends, they have attached Styrofoam balls and those are the only things they had to purchase or source. Being able to turn it into something or something larger than yourself makes the experience really worthwhile and the scale is impactful. Hopefully the audience will appreciate the innovation of artists to use materials to create something beautiful where it hadn't existed before or was just in the recycling bin.

By Brock Weir
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