

Metis art makes sparks important conversation at Aurora Family Leisure Complex



The Aurora Family Leisure Complex is usually a destination for residents to hit the ice, go for a swim, and stay active, but now it's a destination for thought and conversation thanks to the work of Metis artist Tracey-Mae Chambers.

Ms. Chambers' work #hopeandhealingcanada, a crossroads of crocheted, knit and woven yarn to "illustrate connections between Canadians and Indigenous, Inuit and Metis peoples," is now on display at the Complex, hosted by the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Available to view until December 13, the Cultural Centre encourages residents and visitors to come and see what they describe as an "important display of thoughtful creativity, and to be inspired to reflect on the colonization of public spaces in our country."

The Cultural Centre looked at several venues to display Ms. Chambers' work but ultimately decided on the Leisure Complex because it was a family environment and an opportunity to bring art into a public space where it isn't traditionally found.

"It's a place where I used to go a lot when I was a kid," says Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre. "I was kind of an artsy kid and my brother played hockey, so I went to all his games and practices [but] obviously, that wasn't of interest to me and I would look for things to do that were artistic in those environments. We chose the Complex because it's a way of bringing art into a place that is not usually so focused about art. Hopefully all of those families who go to their regular sport events who don't usually have time for seeing art or art-related things, they get to have a little piece of that in their daily lives."

The Centre had "some really good conversations" with Ms. Chambers about the suitability of the Complex as well, says Ms. Jones. A consideration was "all sorts of diverse backgrounds come there."

"I think in decolonization you're thinking about the lack of presence of Indigenous families," says Ms. Jones. "In putting this into that space? it creates an introduction to the Indigenous presence in a family setting. It's a reminder that Indigenous families existed in our communities."

One thing Ms. Chambers did, Ms. Jones added, is look around the Complex for a land acknowledgement. While she didn't find one, Ms. Jones says the Town is in "the process" of getting plaques stating just that for public sites.

"I think when Indigenous people come to the community, they do want to look for that because they're the original peoples of this land and they want some sort of acknowledgement of their existence," says Ms. Jones. "This is a really special installation because it's acknowledging outside the normal land acknowledgement; it's an acknowledgement of the existence of Indigenous peoples and their presence in our community."

?One thing we chose to do is put the write-up actually on the glass, so rather than just seeing this beautiful art installation, which could mean anything, the viewer is confronted right away with the meaning behind the piece, which I think is important because Aurora is still in a place where we're trying to become more educated about Indigenous issues and Indigenous awareness. I think coming into a space like this where people are on their daily routine, we had a lot of people stop and look at the installation on the way to the gym or on their way to practice. It's an interesting way to see these people stop and be confronted by this beautiful piece of art and also the meaning behind the piece.?

But there is also some deliberate ambiguity in how the art is presented.

Ms. Jones says the artist likes to keep her piece ?somewhat open-ended? and open to interpretation.

?That's kind of the beauty of public art. They're meant to speak for themselves. We just want to let people enjoy it on their daily outings to the Family Leisure Complex and we will just see the conversations that naturally evolve.?

#hopeandhealingcanada was installed at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on Industrial Parkway North and will be on display through December 13. For more information on the exhibition, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca/hopeandhealingcanada. For more on artist Tracey-Mae Chambers, visit traceymae.com.

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