

Micak Contemporary Art Gallery features the works of seven GTA artists at its first anniversary celebration



The Micak Contemporary Art Gallery celebrated its first anniversary by presenting the works of seven GTA artists at a reception on Thursday evening.

Owner Katie Micak welcomed visitors and displayed the works of Lisa Cristinzo, Michelle Jamieson, Steven Laurie, Heidi McKenzie, Edmund Mok, Brenda Neives, and J.R. Newton at her St. Andrew's Village plaza gallery.

Four of the seven artists ? Cristinzo, McKenzie, Mok, and Newton ? were in attendance and mingled freely with the attendees.

The motif linking all the artists' works, according to Micak, was 'New Mythologies' and she explained that 'the group exhibition explores how stories, symbols, and archetypes are created, remembered, and re-imagined through contemporary art.'

The painting that encapsulated the exhibition's motif masterfully was JR Newton's 'Silk and Ashes'--a haunting work that features foreground techniques belonging to the Renaissance Masters, but also offers a contemporary twist of 'meticulous realism' to form the background.

Jarring juxtapositions take place in Newton's visual narrative: a dynamic female in the foreground could belong in any Da Vinci painting, but lurking in the background as a challenge to the hero's well-being are smokestacks belching effluents--marring the character's future. The centrepiece of the painting could, indeed, belong in a Renaissance gallery, but the background images are disturbingly modern. Newton seems to be celebrating human beauty bathed in radiant light, but it's about to be inundated by the dark side of humanity represented by unbridled industrialism and its impact on climate change.

There is a serene confidence in Newton's protagonist--in her eyes and the placement of her hands--but inbound smoke creates the same kind of green miasma that comprised Neo's murky world in *The Matrix*. Newton engaged with his many appreciative fans and he discussed 'bringing old to new' where futurism meets surrealism. It's the Renaissance meeting the Apocalypse. She's asking herself: Is there hope??

Newton's propensity towards grand Renaissance style led to a recent opportunity to augment his impressive portfolio by 'creating

thirty-six paintings that capture the stories of The Bible for Our Lady of Peace Church in Milton ? under the scrutiny of my patron.?

It's evident that Newton's compelling paintings are in demand not only in Milton, but in Aurora. One of the highlights of Thursday night's reception was the unveiling of a portrait of Mayor Tom Mrakas, painted by Newton. The stunning likeness?complete with the Mayor's glittering chain of office?was presented to Mayor Mrakas by the hospitable gallery owner ?as a thank you to the Town for its support of the gallery in its first year of operation in Aurora.?

After the presentation of Newton's painting to the appreciative Mayor, a lively and engaging Q and A ensued during which attendees connected with the insights offered by Cristinzo, McKenzie, Mok, and Newton.

It was clear that the artists and audience enjoyed each other's company and, as the refreshments were consumed by attendees, Newton noted succinctly in an aside that ?It's a fun show.?

The pleasant, celebratory atmosphere to which the gregarious painter alluded was on full display on Thursday night at the Micak Contemporary Art Gallery's first anniversary celebration.

By Jim StewartLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter