

Said Through Silence takes artistic look at how tech has changed our lives



William Lottering exchanged many ideas with his students as a long-time art teacher at Aurora High School. He was, of course, a generation or two removed from the students he taught, but many themes in art were and remain universal.

But how many generation-spanning universals remain in our fast-paced world?

That's a theme now being explored at the Aurora Cultural Centre in the new exhibition Said Through Silence.

Said Through Silence is the brainchild of Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre.

The digital age, she says, has transformed the world and reshaped how we live and communicate with one another.

'While some recall life before technology was embedded into daily routine, some have never known a world without it, putting forth unique challenges in ways we communicate and relate to each other,' she says in her curatorial statement. 'In a world so connected, how is it we feel so distant?'

'Said Through Silence meditates on this phenomenon by bringing together the introspective works by four local artists into direct visual conversation. Touching on themes of home, nature, technology and abstraction, the exhibited works look inward on what life is like growing up and adapting within a rapidly changing world, with a particular focus on our shared home in York Region.'

Said Through Silence formally opened to the public last Thursday, May 1, in the Centre's Great Hall Gallery. It was a double celebration as the evening also marked the opening of When Aurora Thaws: A Visual Soliloquy by Jianming Chen.

Chen, a resident of Newmarket, has the distinction of being the very first Artist-In-Residence at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

His works, more than 50 of which are on display, depict various outdoor scenes painted around Aurora as the community thawed out from its last blast of snow in the early spring.

'There are so many scenes around here from the beautiful Aurora Arboretum, Tim Jones Trail, Sheppard's Bush. I was born in Newmarket and lived in Aurora my whole life and have never been so proud of the beauty Aurora offers. Thank you so much for celebrating that for us,' said Jones, addressing Chen at last week's opening reception.

Said Through Silence, she added, was "kind of created on a whim" of wanting to bring different generations of local artists together.

"It was about combining artworks by different generations of artists that are residing in York Region and I am so happy to have artists from Gen Z or Gen Alpha " I don't want to pick out who is the youngest artist " all the way to artists born "in the 1950s," she said. "It's just so amazing to see different styles of work come together on the same plane and see surrealism between generations come across.

"I am just so happy to have them upstairs in the show."

Also pleased to be back in the Centre is Lottering who has deep roots with the Centre.

Before his retirement from the Aurora High School art department, he was instrumental in helping the Centre establish its Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts.

Now, instead of turning the focus over to the artists he mentored, he's among those in the spotlight.

"I think [Jones] defined something we all could have in common and all of us identified with the theme in a different way," he said, admitting to being the eldest in this particular collective of artists.

Work he created for the show reflect many aspects of his own personal journey, including his childhood in South Africa, where economic, cultural, and racial divides were all too apparent, and his journey to Canada with his family.

"People arrive here and it's like a chessboard " things get moved around, and there is always this threat "and unknown fear and you can talk to any new immigrant and they will tell you that. It's the fear of not making it, the fear of maybe memories fading, fear of people dying, your family dying or passing away," he says, pointing to an array of work with an omnipresent fly presiding over the scenes.

"I think the time you're living imprints on how you see things differently and maybe in this case, our own different ages " it does affect how we take the theme. I remember specifically when 9/11 happened and that we all started, even my students, all started making reactionary works and it showed that people were so influenced by the events of the time.

"Quite a few of my students are now artists" and it is interesting to see that sometimes they have kept some of those ideas " not because of me, but because of them. It's a very interesting process. "

For more on Said Through Silence and When Aurora Thaws, including associated programming, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

By Brock Weir