

Societal change on full display at Revolution Now exhibit in Aurora



The more Ava Dedier learns about her roots and her culture, the more complete she feels as a person.

The Markham-raised artist knew a fair bit about her family's roots in Trinidad, but knew all too well that so much of their African heritage had been lost along the way. But it is through her art that she found a way to help fill in the blanks, and the results of this poignant journey are now on display at Aurora's Royal Rose Gallery in Rise Together, a celebration of artists who have been impacted by Revolution Now.

Revolution Now, a social movement co-founded by Aurora teacher Megan Glanfield, aims to create visibility, opportunity and community for marginalized and racialized people. Since its inception, it has raised tens of thousands of dollars to support youth through scholarships and donations to non-profits.

The work of several youth who have been supported through these scholarships was in the spotlight on Friday evening when members of the community gathered at the Downtown Aurora gallery for Rise Together's opening reception.

The reception was both a fundraiser for future scholarships as well as a way to showcase success stories coming out of the program to ticket-holders and dignitaries, including Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy and Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas.

Dedier first became involved with Revolution Now as a Grade 12 student in Unionville when, as a budding artist, she secured a scholarship through the program.

“It just kind of solidified all the hard work I've been doing throughout Grade 12 and all my life, and to know that there's scholarships for Black youth and people like me, and young girls, it just felt very empowering because usually you don't find organizations that support specific groups of people, but I felt very seen and very heard when I got it, and I was super-happy.”

As part of the show at Royal Rose, which runs through to the end of January, Dedier selected three works from her 17-piece collection called Trendsetters, with each piece representing a different African god or goddess.

“I used art as a way to reconnect with my lost heritage and research and learn and make art in turn,” she explains, pointing to the portrait-style works that incorporate vivid, traditional textiles. “My family is from Trinidad by way of Africa and I know a lot about the Trinidadian part, but lots about the African traditions and stories, folklore and stuff got really lost. I realized that was a big problem because I wanted to know where I came from originally.”

Through my art, I used the research to gain more insight into that culture and I actually learned how to sew from a Ghanaian seamstress. I felt as I was making the artworks it was more than just art; it was the people I was meeting with and connecting with and the stories I was learning to gain more information.

Dedier's father, Robert, says the opportunities Ava has had through Revolution Now, including this chance to explore their collective roots through their art has been amazing.

It's a breath of fresh air, says Robert of Revolution Now's commitment to racialized, marginalized, or otherwise under-represented populations. In the art world itself, especially in Canada, racialized people make up a small percentage of the work that's being shown. Initially, my daughter asked, "Do you think people will like my art because it's Black-centred?" I said, of course they're going to like your art? What it did for her was kind of broke that mentality that she doesn't have a voice and she realized she was being taken serious as an artist. This opportunity in itself changed a lot of her perspective.

I'm a big advocate for knowing and remembering who we are, where we came from, and being proud of that. In teaching my daughter that aspect of herself, she was able to find herself and she was able to teach me things I never knew. We were able to discover and learn together.

This is a sentiment very much shared by Ava.

I really hope my art just sparks conversations, says the University of Western Ontario student. If there's something that they didn't know before, but they are interested in, I'm glad that I can be that source of knowledge for them because I feel most of the gaps in either representation or things of that nature just occur from lack of knowledge. I like being able to educate while I show my art at the same time.

As a person, I am someone who loves to learn and I feel like the more I learn about myself, and my roots and my culture, the more I can really feel whole as a person. I feel like especially since I am very young, I'm still kind of finding myself, learning more about what I'm passionate about, like art and culture, and it just builds me as a person and the woman I'm becoming.

For more information about Revolution Now, visit revolution-now.ca.

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