

SOYRA artist shines light on water health with new Cultural Centre show



Have you taken a moment this summer to completely unplug from the digital realm and reconnect with the world around you?

If you haven't yet had the opportunity, former Aurora resident Carol Walthers is inviting you to do just that by visiting her new art exhibition, *Streaming*, on now through September 14 at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Located in the Cultural Centre's Lower Hall Gallery, *Streaming* – which was inspired by 'stream' and 'dreaming' – is designed to highlight 'quiet, reflective time in nature.'

'Paddle on a quiet pond and be surrounded by thick swaths of lily pads with aquatic life hidden below, as the canoe creates a gentle wake you see under the surface to the myriad of life underneath,' says the Cultural Centre. 'This exhibition is an invitation to unplug from the digital media and consider the wetlands and deposits of gravel below – filter agents for our water and essential for our survival. Confronting the irrevocable loss of wetlands and wildlife habitats caused by industrial and urban expansion, the artist poses a vital question: can we still protect our groundwater and conserve these critical ecosystems?'

Streaming welcomed its first visitors on July 17, but was formally opened Thursday evening with a celebratory 'hallway party,' which also marked the opening of *From Rocks to Brushstrokes: A Geologist's Artistic Transformation*, showcasing the work of Rose Zhao.

Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre, said she was 'captivated' by the 'vibrant' imagery used by Walthers, now a resident of Cambridge, ON, in her work.

Still involved with the Society of York Region Artists (SOYRA) after her move, Thursday's reception was not only an opportunity to showcase her work and its message, but reconnect with her fellow York Region artists.

'My work is environmental, and I have been doing it for quite a long time,' Walthers told the crowd. 'There were a lot of social issues that just sort of started bubbling up, and I had to react to that. This is actually my fifth solo show on environmental issues and it all started with the loss of farmlands due to industrial intervention. It's now farmlands, wetlands and groundwater – I think I'm going to be touching upon forests next.'

Speaking to *The Auroran*, she said nature has always been an 'important feature' in her work, but 'recently I find I can't separate nature from how people interact with it.'

“Contrasting the beauty of this land and its creatures with the unfortunate lack of reverence for the finiteness of what we are so privileged to enjoy has now become a driving force behind my work,” she said. “Our aquifers such as the Oak Ridges Moraine, and the Grand River Watershed are where we derive a significant drinking water supply. Yet time and time again development encroaches on these areas. Water is pulled from our ground for industrial uses at a rate that is staggering. Gravel mines are allowed to dig below the water line with no understanding of the long-term effects. The diligent work of groups such as Water Watchers, Reform Gravel Mining Coalition, and Environmental Defense hasn't been enough to reverse our current course. I fear that recent legislation has devastated any hope we have of speaking out against industrial intervention. Can we do it? Yes. With better management practices and a concerted effort for conservation, there is hope that we can ensure our water is protected.

“In my work, I present a thoughtful reflection on the fragility of our world. I invite viewers to let go of gravity and experience this microcosm on different planes. I encourage them to reflect on their relationship with our life force: water. My hope is to inspire dialogue and curiosity through a visually stimulating experience. I also want to offer ecological hope within a climate of ecological grief and encourage advocacy for water with supporting groups or getting involved with organizations like Water Watchers, Reform Gravel Mining Coalition, and Environmental Defense.”

To engage with Walthers and her work, she will host a Closing Talk at the Aurora Cultural Centre on Sunday, September 14, from 2 – 4 p.m., where she will feature her work and, as the Centre says, “her intensive research and practice that has fuelled her several recent solo exhibitions.”

To RSVP, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca/streaming.

By Brock Weir
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