

SOYRA artists celebrate colour and joy in 2014 showcase



By Brock Weir

People take bad breakups different ways.

Some handle it well, and some don't. Occasionally tears are shed, items are broken, but sometimes it brings out the best of us. When Jennylind James, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, lived in Dublin, her breakup with her Irish boyfriend, however, embarked on a creative journey which has led her, most recently, to the Aurora Cultural Centre.

?I wanted to find some outlet for the depression and a way to uplift me,? she says. ?A friend suggested going for painting classes at an artist's home in Waterford and it was very casual. I started painting oranges, fine. Then a plant. Fine. Finally, I said, ?I don't like still life, it's driving me crazy. I want to do portraits.?

Her teacher, in turn, thought she was crazy, but in time she produced her first portrait, of 1998 Miss Universe Wendy Fitzwilliam, a fellow-Trinidadian.

A big fan of flashy colour, her portrait of ?Dame Lorraine?, a vintage stock character from traditional Carnival celebrations, is a focal point of the Great Hall Gallery as part of the Society of York Region Artists' (SOYRA) 2014 Showcase, which runs through Sunday afternoon.

Ms. James has stayed loyal to her Caribbean heritage and after pursuing food sciences in Montreal, put her degree to use in the United States before being snapped up by an Irish food company. From there, she began her own company promoting Caribbean flavour to Irish palates, but eventually work brought her back to the Toronto area.

Dame Lorraine was a classic character in pantomime celebrations around the Caribbean world. A comedic character often portrayed by men, actors took on the challenge by stuffing themselves with pillows and cushions to ?exaggerate the female form.?

Her second painting depicts an elaborately face-painted child having the time of his life within the celebrations.

?I still had Caribbean images in my subconscious after living there for more than 15 years,? she says of her time in Ireland. ?I hope people take away a joy of colour. I try to evoke joy in painting. If they can have a few laughs and think Dame Lorraine is funny, I want happiness to radiate out of my work.?

Conversely, artist Nancy Newman, a mainstay of SOYRA, took part of her inspiration from Ireland. 2013 was a year of travel for

Ms. Newman and her family, taking them through northern Europe. Her watercolour, Irish Fortitude, was inspired by a ruin that remains standing despite the ravages of time.

?I wanted to capture that old stonework without it being super-detailed, but still knowing that some humans built that and it is still standing in the countryside,? says Ms. Newman, noting a second painting of a port village in Norway.

?These show the idea of how many ways you can see the artist treat paint and how they use it. When you look from my work to someone else's, you will see huge contrasts in style and that is really healthy for a viewer and someone wanting to learn about painting to see ways they can treat the subject matter.?

Exemplifying this is Thelma Sellers, a resident of Sutton, who proudly displays her colour inspired work in the show. What originally started off as a black and white painting quickly turned into a rhapsody in blue incorporating not only paint, but also painting, cheese cloth, and even feathers.

?SOYRA is a fabulous group of people,? says Ms. Sellers. ?The Cultural Centre is a beautiful place to show art. It's a great place and worth the 45 minute trip!?

For more about SOYRA, visit www.soyra.ca.