

## Spring shows breathe new life, frosty memories into Aurora Cultural Centre galleries



The Aurora Cultural Centre is opening up a fresh season of spring gallery shows this Thursday, May 1, with the formal launch of two new exhibitions.

Taking over the Centre's lower hall gallery from May 1 ? July 13 is Jianming Chen, the Centre's very first artist-in-residence; while upstairs, a group exhibition called Said Through Silence will bring cross-generational perspectives on our world to the Great Hall Gallery.

Chen's exhibition, described as a 'visual soliloquy', is entitled 'When Aurora Thaws?', and captures more than 50 scenes painted around Aurora as this spring arrived.

A resident of Newmarket, Chen is an oil painter specializing in painting 'en plein air', or in the great outdoors, even setting up his easel roadside to capture the beauty all around us.

Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre, says when they chose Chen as their first artist-in-residence, they expected perhaps 20 different artworks to be created during the February 1 ? April 30 residency, so the more than 60 completed pieces is a testament not only to the artist but the success of the Centre's fledgling Residency programs.

'This residency has really shown if we invest in our local talent what they are truly capable of. Jianming has really expressed that he feels like a star with this opportunity. He hadn't had a solo show before, so this is a really great event that is announcing his work to the community and recognizing him as quite a local figure,' says Jones, noting he was inspired to capture the community's recovery from winter after one of the more recent final blasts of the season.

'He documented Aurora first as it got piled up with snow and then, because he was here so frequently, almost every other day, he painted Aurora as the snow was thawing. In the oil paintings in the exhibition, you can literally see the Aurora landscape [and] the snow melting away. You'll see houses piled high with snow. He'll return to the same locations actually to paint at different times. You'll often see the same scenes looking completely different because they have been transformed over a couple of weeks of the weather becoming warmer and the snow melting.'

Said Through Silence, which runs from May 1 through July 27, is the brainchild of Jones herself.

Bringing together a collective of artists representing multiple generations, it looks at how the Digital Age has transformed our world.

'While some recall life before technology was embedded into daily routine, some have never known a world without it, putting forth unique challenges in the ways we communicate and relate to each other. In a world so 'connected', how is it that we feel so distant?' says Jones. 'Said Through Silence meditates on this phenomenon, 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 and adapting within a rapidly changing world, with a particular focus on our shared home of York

Region.?

The show features the works of artists Jin Fu of Newmarket, Karim Abed of Newmarket, area Grade 12 student Rollex Austin, and William Lottering, the former art teacher at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, who was instrumental in helping the Centre develop the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts.

‘If I could, I would give them all solo exhibitions because they're all so amazing. With this particular show, I was really inspired by combining different perspectives, especially across different generational timeframes, from the perspective of artists,’ says Jones. ‘What's really interesting that I have noticed lately is in talking to parents and talking to students, as well some of our season's artists, is their perspectives of life are so different because of how they have grown with technology.

‘We are always connected with each other, but I think at the same time there is also this expression of notice in the community about feeling incredibly distant from each other, even though we're all just a touch away from our smartphones. This work is about bringing those experiences together through four different artist perspectives. The work doesn't necessarily reflect on that specific theme, but the works are very reflective of their own lives and I think by bringing together those reflections of their own lives, it is a conversation about what it means to really be living right now in this era and especially in York Region, because they are all York Region-based.’

Both exhibitions will open with a special reception on Thursday, May 1, from 6.30 ? 8.30 p.m. with artists in attendance.

On Saturday, May 10, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., both exhibitions will play host to an Artist-Poet Gathering where participants are invited to ‘create spontaneous written or visual responses to the artworks on display,’ inspired by 90 minutes of ‘viewing, social and creative time, followed by a 30-minute session’ to present responses in an open mic style.

For more information, visit [auroraculturalcentre.ca](http://auroraculturalcentre.ca).

**By Brock Weir**