

Students descend into realm of dreams and nightmares in Apparitions



By Brock Weir

We all know the feeling of waking up with a start, but we don't always know what we were dreaming when that happened. Andrew Basso, a Grade 11 student at Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, didn't have to dig too deep in trying to remember a nightmare. His nightmare involved lying in the middle of the road, unable to move other than to roll, with a big truck coming straight towards him.

He always woke up before knowing whether he was able to roll to safety, but the image stuck with him ? and it is one image in which he had the chance to dig deep as one of three area students working with Aurora artist Troy Hourie on his latest exhibition Apparitions.

Apparitions, which wrapped up Saturday at the Aurora Cultural Centre, was billed as ?an immersive mixed-media installation composed of The Bed, The Attic and The Writing Cabinet? inspired by Benjamin Britten's opera The Turn of the Screw.

Bringing in a collection of found ? and often macabre ? objects, married with video components and other interactive displays, it was an installation in which viewers could fully put themselves in the middle ? and thanks to a grant from the Ontario Arts Council, Mr. Hourie was able to take some students along for the ride.

Mr. Hourie facilitated two workshops to coincide with Apparitions which allowed the three participating students ? Basso, along with Meagan Puopolo and Jacob Shwarze ? to explore the creative process and their interaction with space and technology and create their own ?cabinets of wonder? hinged on the themes of dreams and nightmares.

?The important part of this workshop became about explaining the term 'intermediality', which is a way of working where it means the connections of the body moving in space, interacting with tools, whether pencils, projections, or paint, and creating an artwork,? Mr. Hourie told The Auroran on Saturday at a mini-exhibition allowing the three students to show off their work alongside the larger installation. ?It can be for theatre, it can be for architecture and the visual arts, it is a very broad practice and there aren't a lot of us who practice right now.

?Within the Ontario Arts Council, there is something called Inter-Arts [for] artists like myself who practice across a variation of the arts,? he said. ?In this piece, I wanted to take the students through my basic idea of the Cabinet of Wonder and show them how to use collage to represent ideas and personal reflections on the idea of dreaming and nightmares and looking back to their childhood, and memories. Then, [teaching about] representing that visually in some way and connecting it to technology. Within this, we began with a one-day workshop just on creating an assemblage cabinet, which is a cabinet of wonder. Then, on the second day, I took them into the actual space.?

When Andrew first learned this exhibition was called ?Apparitions? he immediately thought of ghosts and other spooky things, but was intrigued when he learned it was more about nightmares and dreams.

?I just started going through my own nightmares and the dreams I remembered, how spontaneous they are [in the moment] and then, when you really think about them, they are not really that scary thing,? said the student. ?It is really that feeling of helplessness because you're stuck. Dreams are similar, but you don't feel stuck.?

The image of the truck coming towards him as he was stuck on that road is one image he couldn't shake and this feeling of being 'stuck' was represented in his work, which features images of an individual swimming and stuck in the middle of a wave, and another person, also stuck, hanging above.

'[Troy] told us to bring in 15 images of our nightmares and dreams and I thought, 'that doesn't seem too hard,' Andrew recalled. 'Then, I spent about three hours looking on the internet for something that worked. What seemed at first super-easy was a lot harder than you think. Then, when I got here, I thought I would be overwhelmed with work. When I started getting into it, I realised if I just finished it I could make something great.'

At the end of the day, he's satisfied with his work and hopes that it will raise questions with viewers, rather than people just 'looking at it, thinking 'that's cool' and walking away.'

A techie guy at heart, Andrew said he particularly enjoyed working with the video technology components Mr. Hourie brought into the process, and is now eyeing a possible future with possibilities that flex his creative muscles.

'It was just so much more fun because you can create your own thing,' he said, comparing the artistic process against math and science, his two academic specialities. 'You're not following a set of rules, so moving forward I like the narrative that we made with the video and stuff like that. I loved making narratives and creating things that people are interested in.

'Moving forward, you shouldn't be overwhelmed by something. If something comes along, take the opportunity because you don't get a lot of those. When you have the opportunity, do what you can with it. Listen to people who know what they're doing, let them tell you that, take what you're going to take, and move forward with that knowledge.'