

Students unleash unbounded creativity ahead of Youth Arts celebration



Do you do your best work when it's assigned, or when you're able to create something just for you? Your answer might not be the same as that of the person next to you, but as long as the creativity is flowing, that's the main thing.

That is the message to area Grade 12 students from the Aurora Cultural Centre as this year's art grads put the finishing touches on pieces that will adorn the walls of Town Hall next month as part of the 2023 Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts.

For more than a decade, the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts has been a chance for the Aurora Cultural Centre to give graduating students from all of Aurora's high schools the opportunity to curate and host their own professional art show. But new this year, the exhibition has been opened up to all Grade 12 students in the community whether they made their art for class, or whether it's simply a personal passion project.

"I think the hurdle of COVID-19 was a shock to a lot of the students, so this is a good opportunity and outlet for their perspectives again after being confined for the last two years," says Samantha Jones, Aurora Cultural Centre Gallery Manager, of the Celebration, which was confined to the virtual realm for 2021 and 2022. "This show is actually going to be open to the public and the students are going to have a lot of people seeing their artwork and responding to their artwork, which is a totally different way of experiencing art and being an artist, rather than just showing your work online.

"We have opened [the celebration] up to basically anyone who is going to school in Aurora, who is in Grade 12, who has taken a Grade 12 art class. Even children who have been home schooled who are [doing] Grade 12 art ? we're not limiting it. It's open to everyone. Students don't have to submit art that they created for a school project. As an artist myself, some of the best work that I created in high school was work I created alone in my bedroom ? and a lot of students I know in the last few years have created a lot of work alone in their bedroom!?"

Some students, such as those attending Cardinal Carter Catholic High School on Bloomington Road, are doing some last-minute details on school assignments that will figure into the exhibition.

"I wanted to show my own artistic expression and how I view the world," says Grade 12 student Vera Ibrahim, whose portrait of a pained Leonardo DiCaprio is titled "Agony."

"When I saw the image, the amount of emotion is what inspired me to recreate it in my own way," says Vera, adding that another

contribution to the show will be a children's book that reflects her love of baking. 'It's mainly about baking bread and how a little girl learns patience through it. I want people to look at the storybook and maybe learn a little patience of their own and be inspired to bake bread. I think I just want people to connect with it in their own way and interpret it how they want.'

Similarly, fellow student Lauren Mayer's drawing of a deer with human hands for antlers is a reflection of not just an in-class assignment of hand-drawing, but her own passion for biology and wildlife.

'I wanted to show what it means to be in touch with nature and humans' connection to nature,' says Lauren. 'I want them to see how important it is to be respectful for nature.'

Nature is also a theme in the art of Alexis Pereira.

Incorporating skulls from a class assignment, Alexis went a different route in presenting a 'happy' version of this particular part of the anatomy 'complete with vividly bright and cheery colours.

'I want people to be happy,' says Alexis. 'When I'm in nature, I'm happy and I want people to experience that. I'm honoured to be chosen [for the Celebration] and to be able to have this opportunity and to just create opportunities in the future.'

These feelings are shared by Mahyar Jaber Koushki.

This Grade 12 student's depiction of the skull in the work entitled 'Nightmare' is a different interpretation from Alexis', but no less passionate.

'The main point was to create something new which people haven't seen before,' he explains. 'The most enjoyable thing [exhibiting art] is you see how people see the world around them and how they think: what they think when they're doing this art, why they wanted [to go in this direction] and why they wanted to show it.'

That's part of the excitement for Cardinal Carter teacher Catharine Glyn-Williams, who says shows like these are 'an amazing opportunity to see how the community comes together.'

'There's a really nice spin on both tech and visual arts coming together and the kids are having an opportunity to really foster learning between each other and feed off one another 'and what a beautiful outlet to do it in, where we have community, students, and artists together. It gives them a chance to develop a show: it's cleaning things up, making things look refined, giving them a chance to see that there are people out there who are the same age and ones that have come before them to see what they need to do. To me, it's a beautiful opportunity and I wish we did more of it!'

If you're a young artist who wants to be a part of it, application forms are available at auroraculturalcentre.ca/mcoya2023 and will be accepted through January 20. The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts will be on at Town Hall's temporary gallery space from Saturday, February 11 through Saturday, March 18, with the exhibition continuing online through Saturday, April 1.

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