

Unique voices find their place in Cultural Centre's visual arts season



The Aurora Cultural Centre welcomed its first visitors into their temporary gallery space at Town Hall last week in a return to some degree of normalcy.

It was a chance for patrons to see the work of up-and-coming artists as local Grade 12 students filled the space as part of the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, which runs through March 21, and that is just the tip of the iceberg for the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Last week, the Centre announced their spring season, including a full array of visual arts programs. In addition to the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, an artists' collective will take over the space from March 28 - April 22 for *Upon Reflection - Portraits of Personal History*, followed by *Backstories: The Researching Artist as Traveller & Interviewer*, featuring the work of Andrew Cheddie Sookrah, which runs through July 18.

"There's just a level of excitement that cannot be quantified in terms of planning for this season and preparing," says Stephanie Nicolo, the Cultural Centre's Acting Gallery Manager. "During the planning process, it was always a consideration that the public wouldn't be able to get up close to the work but the hope was always there; now that there is a good sign we're going to have those opportunities for visitors to get up close, see the dimensions, feel the sense of shape for the work and the scope of the work that is coming in, it is a very exciting time.

"If we had the opportunity to bring in the public, I wanted to bring in the work that allowed the visitor to have a different sense of visual arts that pixels can't accommodate. Of course, we're still providing the exhibition in a digital format for those who won't be able to come in person, there is still that element of our exhibitions, but when I choose the artists, I'm choosing works that have a delicacy that is best represented in person."

The participating student artists rose to the challenge in this regard, creating works that span almost the complete gamut of themes and media. Topics explored by the Grade 12 students through their art includes Black Lives Matter, body dysmorphia, mental health, blood diamonds, and even the feeling of being isolated during a global pandemic.

"I would say there is a feeling of isolation throughout the works, including the topic of how the artist felt creating in isolation or living through restrictions and being told to stay home - that's a very specific topic that came out of this exhibition and this year's presentation," says Ms. Nicolo.

When the youth move out, a variety of artists will move in for Upon Reflection ? Portraits of Personal History, including photographers Eden Graham and Nicole Crozier, and Ebrin Bagheri who works in drawing and painting.

?The show is to investigate the concept of portraiture and how a portrait is presented and understood,? says Ms. Nicolo, noting that Bagheri's work includes pieces done through unusual means, including the humble ballpoint pen, while Crozier takes a fashion-forward approach to her work.

?They're not necessarily personal histories but comments on how individuals can create personal history or showcase personal history through clothing,? says Nicolo. ?Her work is connected directly with fashion, so she has created these collages of fabric and clothing pieces. You can't quite tell where the portrait is. You have a singular presentation on the image but you're not quite sure where the person is.?

Next up is artist Andrew Cheddie Sookrah with his exhibition Backstories: The Researching Artist as Traveller and Interviewer.

?We're doing quite a reflection on his creation and his portfolio,? says Ms. Nicolo. ?We'll be doing figurative works and landscapes as well as sculpture. His landscapes really are commenting on climate and the changes of climate and the importance of paying attention to that, including some iceberg paintings. Then he has created sculptures through porcelain of these icebergs. It is going to be a very interesting show that will really benefit in terms of having visitors come see it in person.

?We have made amazing connections with wonderful opportunities from across Ontario, across artists communities, and I look to those relationships to continue to grow some really interesting, thought-provoking and multi-layered exhibitions. That is where I truly want to continue to provide the community of Aurora.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter