

Universal themes add colour to Aurora in Bell Box project



Artists can find inspiration both in the world around them and the traditions in which they were raised.

These traditions can vary from culture to culture but, when you scratch the surface, universal core principles can help bridge any gap that might be in the way.

This has been the experience of artists Ren Lonechild and Sherlyn Hu, just two of more than a dozen artists from Indigenous and other backgrounds, who have brought their talents and experiences together to transform eight Bell utility boxes across the community into landmarks of artistic and cultural exchanges.

This artistic program is an initiative of the Aurora Cultural Centre, with support from the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe, and artists have fanned out across Town through the first half of this month to bring their visions to life.

On Wednesday, The Auroran caught up with Lonechild, a mural artist of Cree and Lakota heritage, and Hu, an artist with a Chinese background, as they worked together towards their theme of "family and ancestral tradition" on a box on Henderson Drive.

"This is a cross-cultural coming together of the celebration of family and intergenerational giving and knowledge transfer," said Hu. "On my side, I'm depicting a grandmother holding a baby. In our culture, we're very big with respecting our elders and we very much appreciate the knowledge we get from our elderly."

Hu's interpretation of the theme sees a grandmother and grandchild embraced over a bowl of soup.

"Food is something we always give as a sign of love and tradition, also with motifs such as a lotus flower and a chrysanthemum," she continues, adding she incorporated a lantern into the background design to mark the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Integral in Lonechild's design is a traditional medicine wheel "a motif he tries to incorporate into most of his work.

"It is an image of Mother Earth with a medicine wheel in the middle," he explained. "Most of our beliefs centre around the medicine wheel, which is always [divided into] fours. We have four directions, we have four seasons, and all the elements. She is basically holding the knowledge in her hand, so she's giving people on earth knowledge "and offering knowledge to the child.

?That is what this is all about. I'm Cree and Lakota, so this is a Cree-style artwork and it is meshing well with Sherlyn's Chinese artwork ? an amazing piece of two cultures combining.?

Both agree there are ?a lot of similarities? across cultures that they've discovered through their work.

?In both of our cultures there's the connection between generations and the respect for giving and sharing, and also the connection with nature. With that piece, I find there are a lot more similarities than differences that people think. I'm learning a lot from Ren and his artistic talent.?

?What she said,? added Lonechild with a laugh. ?My background has very similar beliefs and just different perspectives. Seeing this work mesh and blend in with the others is kind of breathtaking. It's hard to explain, but this cross-culture blending in with each other is just jiving and making this a really amazing piece.?

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