

Upcoming grads putting finishing touches on Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts



By Brock Weir

Whether they are in the dark room, furiously wielding their paint brush, or limbering up their fingers for a few finishing touches on a sculpture, local Grade 12 students are gearing up to showcase their creativity for the community at large in the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts.

For the past seven years, graduating arts students from all four of Aurora's high schools gave pulled out all the stops for winter exhibitions at the Aurora Cultural Centre. Last year was the first time all four high schools worked collaboratively on a single show and this year is the first under the new banner of 'The Mayor's Celebration of Arts.'

'Support from the Mayor's Office [on the show] means a lot of opportunities,' says Stephanie Nicolo of the Aurora Cultural Centre, who has helped students curate their art since the program's inception. 'This opportunity for the students has been here for seven years, but having the official support from the office allows for a little bit further support in being able to secure a sponsor. The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts is sponsored by Geranium Homes and this has now allowed us to expand beyond the visual arts. We've always known there is more than just 2D art, so they will be able to now express themselves through spoken word, poetry, film, theatre, dance, music and we've not been able to do that before.'

The bar has been raised and the students are more than willing to meet the challenge.

'Overall, this is a cool experience because you get to present your art and you're proud to show it off to people outside of your school where you know everybody,' says St. Maximilian Kolbe student Verak Kocsik.

Adds Hallie Tutkaluk of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School: 'It is good as a young person to have opportunities like this and take advantage of them because when you're older and further along, it gets harder to have an opportunity to be in a gallery like this. It is a great experience for young artists trying to get into university and develop a good portfolio.'

Participating students are working on projects large and small. Sarah Cole, a student from Williams, for instance, is focusing her attention on both traditional and digital art, including photography, while Sydney Scanga of St. Max is working in acrylics, and Williams' Emily Dougherty is honing her sculpting skills.

'A lot of us will be portraying our self portraits,' says Verak. 'I just want people to get an idea of who we are. That's how I painted it, so people could look at my painting and think, 'Ah, this is the kind of person she is. This is her character.'

Adds Sarah: 'I have been doing digital art for about seven years now and really getting into it over the last three. I am going to be submitting that because it is something I use to express myself a lot.'

Although it is too early to see the social trends that might emerge through the art, a thread might be offered by Hallie who shares some of her work will be looking at presenting 'the teenager perspective on social media' mostly the negatives, she says, but also the positives.

'I am interested to know what the older demographic will think of the ideas that are coming from younger people now,' says Emily. 'I feel like my art isn't something that would normally appear in a gallery like this so it will be interesting to see what the reaction

will be from people coming in thinking that it is more art you would see in galleries and this kind of setting.? Eager to see how things pan out is Mayor Geoff Dawe, who has opened the exhibitions for all of the past six years. ?It is a great opportunity to see some incredible art,? he says. ?I was blown away the first time I came in, to be frank. I wasn't sure what to expect. I always look forward to being surprised. A couple of years have been pretty dark [in theme] but last year was a pretty light show, very friendly. But then I came downstairs and there was a painting of a woman being waterboarded. It was almost a whiplash of emotions when you go from very pastoral pictures to something like that.?

The Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts runs in all galleries at the Aurora Cultural Centre from February 3 to March 3. An artists reception will take place the evening of Wednesday, February 7, which is open to all members of the public, while performance art will ring out through the Centre on Friday, February 9.