

Winter musings, thought-provoking pop art on show at Aurora Cultural Centre



The Aurora Cultural Centre marked something of a homecoming on Thursday evening as the works of several artists, many of whom got their start in the historic Church Street School, came together for musings on women and winter.

The Centre celebrated the openings of 'Forever-22', an exhibition by up-and-coming local artist Julia Mobbs, who was the Centre's artist-in-residence this past fall, and 'What Does a Winter's Night Hold?' showcasing the work of the Centre's artist-instructors, with an evening putting these creators firmly in the spotlight.

Mobbs, whose work first graced the walls of the Aurora Cultural Centre when she was a high school student participating in the Centre's annual Mayor's Celebration of Youth Arts, is a graduate of Concordia University, and uses her paintbrush to focus on images from popular media, archived magazines, leisure culture, and more, as a way to 'challenge the human form and consumer processes.'

As the Centre's Fall Artist in Residence, she created the entirety of her exhibition while participating in the program, and her work can be found throughout their ground floor gallery space.

Speaking to how her work evolved through the residency program, she said the concept of how women are depicted in advertising has always captured her imagination.

'I've always been interested in advertising and consumerism and especially the role that the imagery of women plays in advertising,' she said, when asked how her work evolved during the residency program. 'I'm trying to marry those concepts together because sometimes, at least before I was approaching them from just pictures of women or just pictures of advertising imagery.'

'All of my paintings start with some sort of imagery that's already been produced,' she continued, outlining her non-traditional take on collage work where she brings images together through her brush rather than a more traditional cut-and-paste approach. 'I do collage, but it's not the traditional way of pasting. I do that too, but sometimes in my head I just put together imagery and end up painting it, so I think of collage as just any sort of found imagery and I like to reinterpret that in painting and see how that image gets transformed. I find that's the beauty because replicating imagery? I don't really see why if it's already been produced, why should I repaint it again? I guess my perspective is to try to transform it through painting.' Mobbs' vision for her exhibition, she said, was guided in part by being 'immersed' in Montreal's arts scene. At the time of the opening, titles of each work had not yet been added to the walls beside each painting 'a practice that is more conventional there than at the Centre.'

'It's good to have a title sometimes, it adds to the beauty of the piece, but sometimes I find it can take away if people are overly

interested in finding a reason why this painting was made, or it can take away from the audience experience of the work," she explained. "I do really enjoy making titles for my pieces, but sometimes I find the descriptions and such can take away from the reading."

If the Aurora Cultural Centre provided Mobbs one of the first opportunities to display her art as a student, it also provided new avenues for local artists looking to share their craft with others.

These artists are at the heart of "What Does a Winter Night Hold?" showcasing the works of Centre instructors Katie Argyle, Annwin Arts, Alex Bhatia, Anni Bretschneider, Jessie Chui, Eva Folks, Karin Foulds, Jing Fu, Golbahar H., Arnold Koch, Karen Levert, Liana Marinelli, Michelle Richards, Clermont, Judy Sherman, and Helen Walter.

Curated by Anna Vander Heide, the Aurora Cultural Centre's Interim Education Manager, the show "captures the spirit of the winter; reflecting family gatherings, holiday traditions, and the warmth that carries us through the season."

Last week's opening provided several of the artists an opportunity to speak to their work, and Helen Walter said becoming an instructor when the Centre first opened in 2010 helped her develop her own approaches and practices.

"I've been drawing since I was four-years-old but that doesn't count," she joked. "When it came to painting [with young students] what I found was better than painting myself, and this moves into painting with adults, and that's being part of the discovery, being part of what makes a painting. I had a woman come to me one day at a show and she said, 'Oh, I'd love to paint. It must be so relaxing.' No, no, no, it's decision-making. It's, pardon me, fu---ing up and not knowing how to fix it and 'it's finding your own answer."

"The kids find their own answers. The students find their own answers, and you've been an agent, an observer?. it's like being a producer and the best movie just played. Yes, your credit isn't there, but they did it and, in some small way, so did you ? and it's thrilling. It's more thrilling to see other people's work than it is to see mine."

To see the works on show now at the Aurora Cultural Centre, both shows run until January 25. For more information, visit auroraculturalcentre.ca.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter