

Youth Arts on the Rise drop-in program helps young artists find voice and place

Young York Region artists will have a new place to let their creativity flow as the Aurora Cultural Centre launches its new Youth Arts on the Rise program.

Based on the idea of offering a welcoming 'third space' for youth to explore their artistic side - that is, a place outside of the home or school environment - the free initiative is the brainchild of Samantha Jones, Gallery Manager for the Aurora Cultural Centre, and Gallery Assistant Adora Lau.

It's intended to serve 'arts-impassioned' high school youth from Grades 9 - 12 develop their skills, connect with other arts-minded youth and arts professionals, and provide opportunities for community collaboration.

'Last year when the Mayor's Celebration of Youth Art (MCOYA) was running, I created a program called After School Art Program - ASAP for short - developed out of a need for studio space, providing students with a safe space to create more art and just trying to foster this program for youth within Aurora,' says Lau. 'Youth Arts on the Rise (YAR) is like a continuation of that. During this time in the fall semester, it's the time when students really have arts classes and it is really a need when they are building their portfolio for universities and colleges.'

'This is a place of no judgement, it's a place free of any criteria that are set by schools for projects, it's a space away from home, school and all of the expectations that are set from there, allowing [the students] a space to really create the things they want to create, that maybe touch on their identity, or spaces they wouldn't normally feel sharing - it's a third place away from those identities you're in within those spaces and getting away from that.'

'When I was still in high school I thought about how I have a very limited, small studio space at home and I had limited space to create large scales - that's the goal of this as well to provide an open space for these students.'

YAR is created for and available to all registered high school students in York Region.

While it is an informal space, YAR offers some programmed elements, which begin this Friday, November 15.

One such engagement opportunity is an Open Studio followed by an Art Critique.

'This is a very important practice in arts - to provide constructive criticism on other's work and, in turn, receive constructive criticism on your own work,' says Lau, noting these take place every last Tuesday per month, with 90-minutes allocated for open studio time and 30 minutes for the critique.

The second program offering is what Lau calls Muddled Mural Meet-Up, which allows participating students to collaborate on transforming a movable wall into a multifaceted mural which will be exhibited in local businesses and other locations around Aurora.

The third element of the program is an 'Underground Gallery.'

'Part of the basement space (at the Aurora Cultural Centre) is really barren brick walls and they have gallery rails along the top,' says Lau. 'I want to allow earlier grades, younger grades, to also participate in curating and exhibiting their artwork and to celebrate their artwork as well. That Underground Gallery is open to all high-school age students and the display goes on for two months. All they have to do is show up on the curation day with their artwork and they would curate for about two hours or so and put it up on display, then it would be going on for two months before restarting again.'

For a complete list of dates and times related to YAR, including how to register, visit

auroraculturalcentre.ca/youth-artists-on-the-rise.

By Brock Weir