

Camp and kitsch hit Cultural Centre ? just in time for garage sale season



Spring and summer shoppers know that garage sales can yield all sorts of weird and wonderful delights ? and a new exhibition from the Aurora Cultural Centre this week celebrates all that ? and quite a bit more!

Early Bird Gets the Worm, an exhibition featuring the works of Phuong Nguyen, Carrie Perreault, Joejene C. Santos, Jonah Strub and David Trotter opens Thursday, May 16, at the Centre's temporary gallery space at Town Hall.

Curated by Gallery Manager Samantha Jones, Early Bird Gets the Worm ?focuses on the re-awakening of yard-sale season through a curation of kitschy, curious and questionable works by artists of varying practices, cultures, and identities.?

?Throughout the Spring-Summer season, homes across the region open their doors for an annual purge of personal goods,? says the Centre. ?Driving through the Town of Aurora on a crisp, Saturday morning, one may find streets and boulevards painted with neon Bristol board signs, scribbled with arrows and addresses in permanent marker ? directions to nearby sales. Beneath the sun at first light, neighbours that may be friends, acquaintances, or strangers spill contents of their interior life out the front of their home in hopes for a quick profit from passersby or seasoned bargain hunters.

?Early Bird Gets the Wormmeditates on the sentimental relationship that humans have with the objects that they choose to collect, keep, and/or discard throughout the timeline of their life.?

Helping spark this exhibition, says Jones, was the desire to create a show ?a little more light-hearted and comedic? ? qualities that are not often found on gallery walls.

?I think it is going to be an interesting way to introduce patrons to how comedy, kitsch and camp can be in the realm of contemporary fine art,? says Jones.

?One thing I noticed with the idea of art within Aurora and York Region since I have relocated here and started working as the Gallery Manager, is sort of a somewhat linear idea of what art can look like and what art on the walls can look like. We wanted to pick works and do a show that was really, truly experimental and maybe a bit of a surprise. Just as you would go to a yard sale ? you don't know what to expect when you go, and everyone's personal possessions are very different. Same with art practice. What people do with their art practice is very different and what ties all these artists together is they do work with a lot of found typical objects in new ways.?

Diversity in medium is certainly a theme for the artists Jones and Gallery Assistant Adora Lau have brought together for this show.

David Trotter, for instance, is a leather work artist and designer who uses this medium to create ?almost hyper-realistic? depictions of barns and agricultural landscapes. It's a technique Jones says many people have never seen ? and is reflective of Aurora's early agricultural heritage, particularly the Fleury Agricultural Works.

?We didn't require David to make new work for the show, but he decided he wanted to,? says Jones. ?He's focusing on sites within

Aurora that he has researched and he's worked with the Aurora Museum & Archives to learn about these historical sites. It's very cool that he has taken us in this direction that is very catered specifically to Aurora.?

Also working in a less traditional medium is Phuong Nguyen who explores how Asian cultures were 'appropriated' by western artists to create new works. She uses these pieces to create new works, particularly shattered western fine China, threaded together to create something fresh and evocative.

'They are really powerful images of these objects broken and mended back together,' says Jones. 'It's kind of like she's mending her own culture back together through painting. We chose to include her work because fine China is something you would see a lot of at a yard sale, especially in York Region.'

Working in the sturdier medium of drystone, Carrie Perreault's larger than life installation will find its place at the heart of the gallery.

'I look back at these sales we go to, especially in rural areas, where it looks like they're liquidating the whole contents of the interior of their house and it is all splayed out on the lawn,' says Jones. 'A lot of these pieces, too, you might recognize' you might see air vents or even pipes and wonder, 'What is this object doing here?' For some reason it is all out on their lawn and it is going to create a surreal environment.'

Also among the artists is Jonah Strub, whose drag-inspired ceramic work is a perfect fit for an exhibition that flows through Pride Month.

'One thing that he does that I haven't seen any other ceramics artists do, is he actually puts fake eyelashes on the ceramics as a sort of drag element. He will do it on cats 'drag cat sort of thing with a lot of glitter. It is just very joyful. He's doing a workshop [with us] that is Building Your Own Alter Ego, which is about character building, and free as part of our show.

'His work was included because we wanted to find some very kitschy ceramic pieces, almost playing on the knick-knacks you would find at a grandma or grandpa's house that had been stored for a long time and they have been making these really sentimental keepsakes.'

Strub's workshop will take place on Saturday, June 1, at 11 a.m. to kick off Pride Month and is appropriate for all ages.

'People can create their own King, Queen, and everything in between!?' says Jones.

Additional programs include an Artist Talk in Leather Work with David Trotter on Wednesday, July 13, at 6 p.m.

Early Bird Gets the Worm opens at Town Hall this Thursday, May 16, with an opening reception from 6.30 ' 8.30 p.m. All are welcome.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter