

Get a taste of Studio Tour at Hillary House's Art at the Manor



By Brock Weir

Meredith Blunt describes herself as "slightly introverted", which some might find unusual for a painter.

But the Aurora artist took some persuading in putting herself out there for the public to take in her work. The persistence of fellow artist Angela Durante Dukat, however, did the trick and Ms. Blunt is now making her first public splash in a very big way. Well, two public splashes as a matter of fact.

Ms. Blunt is one of 13 area artists participating in the 2015 Aurora Studio Tour. The brainchild of local painters and sculptors inviting the art-loving public into their home studios to see where the magic happens, the Aurora Studio Tour was founded in 2010.

Spanning eight locations the length and breadth of Aurora, the tour runs Saturday, November 14 and Sunday, November 15 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Although it is now entering its sixth year, the tour has brought together a wide variety of returning and new artists, but if you would like a small taster of just what you might expect from the artists on show, head over to Hillary House starting this Friday, November 6.

Artists participating in the Studio Tour have taken over the National Historic Site for the Aurora Historical Society's (AHS) annual Art at the Manor exhibition, which runs through March.

This connection was made by local photographer Claire D'Aurore who wears two hats as an AHS board member and participating artist on the tour.

"We had an empty space since the Federal Government did not pick us for a World War One exhibit because there was so much demand," says Ms. D'Aurore. "I think it is amazing everyone in the studio tour agreed to do this. I know our hours of operation are not the most convenient, but I hope people do come and enjoy the environment, see how important it is to preserve what little history we have, and help us."

Ms. D'Aurore gives kudos to Christine Valentini, a co-founder of the tour, for her expertise in bringing such a wide variety of paintings together to fit in the unique space that is Hillary House. They are kudos shared by Ms. Blunt who was particularly pleased with the placement of two of her pieces: a portrait of a brown bear on a neon pink background and a digital portrait of a young boy.

"Angela said I needed to get involved, that I was an asset and I wasn't getting out there enough," says Ms. Blunt. "She was really good with the push to get me out there. It is just how I work. A lot of my work is more personal for me and lives more in my head

than in the public eye, but as I get older the more I want to share it with everyone. It was good to make a new friend who wanted to see me out there.?

The bear depicted is the one controversially shot and killed by police in Newmarket earlier this year. It was an emotional experience for the community and one Ms. Blunt said needed to be captured on canvas. Her digital portrait, on the other hand, is more experimental, created by finger stroke on her iPad.

?The iPad came out of necessity when I had my kids and they were very little,? she explains. ?I didn't want to bring my materials out there for fear of them getting into it and my husband found an app called Art Rage. These portraits worked really well because rather than using thick paint, you are using light and pixels. Human skin seems to look more accurate on a screen than it does in thick paint, at least in my eyes.

?I hope this gets my name out there more in the artistic community and also to see that even though most of my life is consumed with being a mum with two young kids, I am finding space to be creative and find my own self. It is an identity that is purely mine and I can contribute to our Town and community and offer a vision I have to share ? and it is as valid as anything else that people put out there in the world.?

For tour co-founder Deborah Campo, the marriage of the Studio Tour and Art at the Manor is a match made in heaven.

?I think this helps establish [the tour] as a cultural element in Aurora,? she says. ?There are a lot of studio tours in York Region and in Ontario. We want to continue this on a yearly basis to make it a cultural event. When children come to these houses [and studios], they are in awe of the colours, the shapes, and I marvel at that. Then you can always chat with incredible people with incredible stories. We are all passionate about our careers as artists, and it is nice to join together and invite other people in.?

For more information, visit www.aurorastudiotour.com.