

"Get off of my fridge and onto my wall"



By Brock Weir

All too often student art winds up stuck to the fridge door of a proud parent or grandparent, but upcoming graduates at St. Max want to show their art is worthy of the wall ? in homes and galleries beyond Aurora.

For the third year in a row, Grade 12 students from St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School have pooled their talents to deliver this message ? and very important messages on social issues relevant the world over ? in a new exhibition now underway at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Guided by teacher Carlos Viaes, it is the culmination of four years of hard work honing their talents as painters, photographers, and multimedia artists.

?This is a finale, but it is also the beginning of letting us get out there and be seen as more than just students,? says student Hilary Romaniuk.

Adds Victoria Petinarelis: ?People usually think, ?This is high school work? It's going on the fridge!' but I want people to come in and say, ?Wow, this is high school work! These are students who know what they are doing.' I want them to take away that we're starting our future and leaving something behind as well.?

For Mr. Viaes, this third iteration of the St. Max exhibition was been the ?easiest and most rewarding yet? thanks to the passion of the students. In their final year, student artists always want to go out with a bang, but there is something different in the air this year.

?They share some really passionate stories in their art pieces that is beyond the art,? says Mr. Viaes. ?That created moments in the classroom that are special and incredible for the rest of the class, and the rest of the peers to come and hear. They will always surprise you. The one thing about teaching in the visual arts is just when you think you have seen it all, someone brings something entirely new to the table and just keeps it fresh.

?My Grade 9 class is just mesmerized. Some of them scare them,? Mr. Viaes adds, before joking, ?like Dylan's is terrifying, but they are always inspired and overwhelmed, saying, ?I'm in Grade 9 and I can't do that.' We're not asking you to do that now. This is what you've got to work towards. This four years has been growth.?

This gentleman out to make an impression is Dylan Torraville, who has created a larger than life piece designed to raise an eyebrow or two.

“Most of the stuff I have painted is more or less reflective of who I am as a person,” he says, before adding to the mirth of his co-curators, “I am not a bright, cheery, rainbow person. I don't mind things that are creepy and maybe somewhat dark, and that reflects in the paintings and pictures I have done. It is a reflection of personality as well as artistic expression and creativity. It is our last year, so you might as well do something that people are going to remember you for and that is what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something I would be really super-proud of, even 25 years down the road.”

Whether they have taken approaches that are “creepy and maybe somewhat dark”, or have created “bright, cheery, rainbow” pieces, many of the pieces reflect social issues important to the students in the hopes of creating a dialogue on the world around us.

According to Victoria Iaboni, this culminating project is intended to “create a piece without showing the words, describing a message about social justice.”

“This goes from lighter topics like vanity to serious topics like homelessness and police brutality,” says Victoria P. “People for the most part had such passion about their topic, not just the art. They had reason for creating the project. We had six weeks to complete the project and just poured a lot of emotion into it.”

Adds Samantha Doswell: “There are some pretty powerful images. One shows a girl with her arms up and real cuts. It is very powerful because it shows this is something that is legit and has affected these people. There is a way to photograph that to make people see this is a real issue.”

Collection 3, the latest exhibition from St. Max's art students, running concurrently with a similar exhibition from Dr. G.W. Williams' art grads is on now at the Aurora Cultural Centre through January 16.