

St. Max grads tackle tough issues in inaugural art show



By Brock Weir

He sits reclining in a chair, his black and white eyes penetrating the viewer as he relaxes.

As you watch him, you can almost feel him stretching back to get comfortable with his legs elevated on a stool ? only on second glance, his stool is a woman, her face obscured by the only abstract splashes of colour on the canvas.

She is anonymous, a feature in the room, a source of mystery and pity for the audience and, at the end of the day, one of the tough issues students at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School are tackling through their art.

Student curators Mikaela Saccucci and Lauren Sanders were hard at work at the start of the week, along with teacher Carlos Viaes, hanging their art in the halls of the Aurora Cultural Centre, the first collaboration between St. Max and the Church Street landmark.

Showcasing the work of the Grade 12 class before they graduate as the class of 2014, the exhibition is not just a way to show off their artistic prowess, but also to tackle the issues they face and messages they are bombarded with every day.

According to Lauren and Mikaela, as they worked to put the show together common themes kept coming up in the works such as war, smoking, gay rights, child labour, and consumerism, but what might surprise audiences, but not necessarily students, was the overriding theme of the objectification of women.

?It is a prevalent theme and something we can relate to,? says Mikaela. ?We see it in the media and it is pretty much everywhere.?

For Mr. Viaes, tackling these sensitive topics was part and parcel of what he was trying to achieve with his students this year. Roaming through the galleries, one will see a multi-part process to art, he says. The first was to break art down into different forms students had yet to experience, including traditional Japanese art forms, and then, working through different genre, charting their own progress.

?The final project culminated in a performance task, which focused on choosing a social justice piece to represent in some way something they are passionate about,? he explains. ?The work in their sketchpads was a culmination of everything they have done this year and they had to pick their favourite piece they felt strong about. Other pieces focused on non-objective art, taking the opportunity to focus rather than on the full composition, using a viewfinder to pick out an image and break it down into its simplest form.

?The last ones were inspired pieces taking 20th century art pieces or artists and representing them in a new, modern interpretation. After four years, it has come to this.?

When the opportunity came to put this show together, Mikaela and Lauren said they jumped at the chance to volunteer their time to curate their work and the works of their peers.

?It was something we were very interested in,? says Lauren. ?We each have four pieces in the art show, and they are the ones we are most proud of. I know for Mikaela and myself they are things helping us get into university and something we are passionate and care about. We are happy to be able to show off, for once, other to our friends and family, and with something which is not for marks.?

The St. Maximilian Kolbe Grad ?Collection? Art Show opens this week and runs through March 22. Student artists will be on hand to show off their work during a reception from 1 ? 4 p.m. on February 15. For Stephanie Nicolo of the Aurora Cultural Centre, this is the longest they have held a student art exhibition, and an ?exciting? new partnership with a relatively new Aurora school.