

Exhibition Opening: It Can Only Be This Place

By Rashana Youtzy / Art / October 2, 2018 / Arts and Culture



A tribute to Scarborough at UTSC’s Doris McCarthy Gallery

Escaping your hometown, especially a suburban one, is a fantasy many of us dream of when growing up—it’s a feeling of not belonging, of there being more out *there* that *here* cannot possibly offer. That sentiment, though no stranger to many residents of Scarborough, is challenged by *It Can Only Be This Place*, which explores the hidden treasures of the city, the solace Scarborough provides to those experiencing diaspora, and the narratives that are woven within its landscape. The exhibition is a reminder that Scarborough has what you need, even if you have not realized it yet, and that there is no reason to be ashamed to call this place home.

It Can Only Be This Place is an exhibition at the Doris McCarthy Gallery (at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus) curated by Tiffany Schofield with art by Hiba Abdallah, Steven Beckly, Alyssa Bistonath, and Patrick Cruz. Schofield has conducted previous ventures studying Scarborough and confronting the perceptions people have of the city. The exhibition was developed in conversation with locals as a means of grasping a comprehensive understanding of Scarborough’s communities and landscapes. For example, one of the first works patrons interact with is Bistonath’s astronaut from *Portals*, a documentary/science fiction film about the Guyanese diaspora in Scarborough. Bistonath is the child of Guyanese immigrants, and since the diasporic group has a large community in Scarborough, the work resonates as a collective symbol for embarking on a new journey despite harsh tensions for newcomers. Abdallah and Bistonath have also worked together on *This Place*, a projection that reflects on what it is like to live in Scarborough—one that gives birth to a sense of self that could not be found elsewhere.

The exhibition engages various senses as the audio from *This Place* becomes the navigating soundtrack to a reflective dialogue of self-discovery. Meanwhile, the tactile nature of a hypothetical souvenir shop stimulates the senses: an array of trinkets demand touch while postcard visuals read “WHERE THE SWEETERMANS LIVE” and chicken shawarma candies rouse tastebuds. Hiba Abdallah uses this hypothetical souvenir shop as a central interaction, marking how Scarborough is perceived, and manifesting the city’s defining characteristics into a tangible form. A dedicated space invites visitors to write letters addressed with *Dear Scarborough*. At the opening reception, the scent of Jollibee chicken was concentrated in the air, celebrating the opening of a new restaurant chain and Scarborough’s Filipino community. The sensory experience of tasting the mango peach pie was incredible.

Scarborough’s significance as a refuge for those experiencing diaspora is established through texts, images, and stories that celebrate the ways in which Scarborough is understood and commemorated. Patrons are privy to intimate memories of Scarborough locals—stories from their childhood about finding solace in the cultural hodgepodge when they struggled with their identity. A myriad of narratives intersects to highlight the multi-faceted nature of the city, reinforcing Scarborough’s cultural, natural, and diasporic landscapes as continuously evolving.

Many of the visitors thus far have been delighted with the exhibition, recognizing themselves in some of the pieces, identifying with phrases on postcards, or finding themselves mesmerized by the allure of the Scarborough novelty apparel. One Scarborough local in attendance, Kachely Peters, attests to the quality of the exhibition and its works: “*It Can Only Be This Place* captures Scarborough’s true essence, one that isn’t usually shared with people who don’t live here. There’s a sense of community here, and it’s evident in the show.” Several other visitors shared this outlook, noting how Schofield and company hold true to Scarborough’s spirit in their works: they praise the city as something more than just suburbia and embrace it for its worth as a cultural hub and sanctuary for growth. Whether or not you are a Scarborough native, attending school in the city, or just visiting, be sure to check out the exhibition and get a taste of the true Scarborough experience.

Doris McCarthy Gallery

1265 Military Trail, Scarborough, Ontario

September 4 to November 3, 2018

Admission is free

Open Tuesday to Friday 11 am to 4 pm

Wednesday until 8 pm

Saturday 12 to 5 pm

Closed Sunday and Monday

More information at

<https://www.utoronto.ca/~dmg/html/exhibitions/thisplace.html>

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