



Street Art Seniors of Stouffville celebrate a vibrant mural. Exhibition opens July 14 at Latcham Art Centre. [photo by Dennis Hristovski]

## CREATIVE PLACEMAKING WITH STREET ART SENIORS

By David Tuley & Jennifer Onlock

What happens when you bring 15 seniors from your community together with 2 art facilitators from Europe and introduce them to 25 cans of spray paint? Pure creative joy!

On Friday, 25, 2022, Lara Seixo Rodrigues and Duarte Cavalinhos landed in Toronto from Lisbon, Portugal to assist Latcham Art Centre in a program called Street Art Seniors of Stouffville (SASS), based on their award-winning LATA 65 program. With funding from the Canadian Government (The New Horizons for Seniors Program-NHSP) and the Whitchurch-Stouffville Legacy Fund, Lara and Duarte led 15 unique and fearless seniors from Stouffville, Ontario in two full days of workshops where they learned about the origins of street art, were introduced to the work of a variety of prominent street artists, and explored the technique of stencil cutting. From the time the knives hit the hands of the SASS group, there was no stopping them.

“Our time with Lara and Duarte is something I will remember forever. Witnessing a group of 15 seniors from our community embark on this journey together was inspiring, motivating, and magical,” said Jennifer Onlock, Manager of Latcham Art Centre. “The participants were immediately engaged in

learning about the history of street art and jumped fearlessly into the creation of stencils. Lots of stencils. As the days progressed, we saw poodles and pandas, flags, and symbols of solidarity emerge. There seemed to be no end to the ideas and determination of the group. Their enthusiasm was motivating,” added Jennifer.

The seniors shared stories while they worked and recognized that they were building a bond through this shared experience. The calm, encouraging nature of Lara and Duarte created a safe and comfortable space to explore creativity, build new skills and friendships. “We talked about placemaking and communities and agreed that making space for art in our community is important for everyone,” said Jennifer.

After two full days of preparation came the creation of the mural. Without hesitation, and with much anticipation, the group approached the panel with the fearlessness and enthusiasm they had the stencil making.

“I thought it would be a lot of scratching on the wall,” said Barbara McKenzie, “It was not at all what I thought it would be... I wouldn’t [now] say it is graffiti, I would say it is street art.”

“It was neat how it all came together, and I could spot the different work of my pals,” said Geddis Ruttan. “It was wonderful, but not garish... When I look at it, I think – how did that happen? There was an acceptance of everything everybody was doing. Nobody was the star or left behind... It was a team.”

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“I thought it was something for pranksters and juveniles... these are messages by people... wanting to share. I’m overjoyed that as a senior I could create something to contribute...” said Lorraine Majcen. “We were making a mark in our community.”

“[The project] gave me a sense of joy to participate in something meaningful like this,” reflected Charlie Hawkins. When asked about his choice of the tag “irregular,” Charlie shared, “I didn’t want to be like everyone else, and not to worry about that,” indicating that it was a statement about embracing where he was in his life now.

“I recall choosing to make a Canadian flag. I was given this challenge to draw it free-handed, and I didn’t have the confidence to and I started and thought ‘ohhhh.’ Duarte said, ‘you are going to be OK.’ He gave me the confidence to do it. It turned out very acceptable. It really boosted my confidence,” said Lorraine. “The friendship, the love, and the joy I felt helped us.”

“There was harmony with everyone working on it. Other people came by and became excited too,” said Geddis. “Our life experience informed our artistic abilities... I think what we did looked quite good,” added Charlie.

“They worked together fluidly, respectfully, and beautifully. Watching them create together opened my eyes to what is possible in a community. It was truly beautiful,” concluded Jennifer Onlock.

One year after its completion, the SASS exhibition showcases this magical project with documents of the three-day process, including photographs, large-scale mural panels, stencils, and a documentary produced by Paradox Pictures. The exhibition runs from **Friday, July 14 – Saturday, August 19** at Latcham Art Centre, 2 Park Drive.

For more, see: [latchamartcentre.ca/exhibitions](https://latchamartcentre.ca/exhibitions)



Spray paint and a LATA 65 stencil. [photo by Dennis Hristovski]



SASS participant Kathy Clark. [photo by Dennis Hristovski]