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OCAD U student union holds art show

Michelle Bitran, Intern, Saturday, June 30, 2012

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OCAD University Jewish student art-show organizers Julia Bernshtein, left, and Liat Shalom stand in front of Shalom's diptych of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, called Atid Varod, which translates from Hebrew to "a pink future." [Michelle Bitran photo]

TORONTO — Members of OCAD University's Jewish student union had a unique opportunity to display their artistic talents as part of an art show last month.

The exhibit, held on June 21 at the Wolfond Centre for Jewish Campus Life at the University of Toronto, featured the work of 11 artists from various programs at the art school. Family, friends, art teachers and the artists enjoyed refreshments while checking out the artwork.

"I think the event is important just to raise awareness in the Jewish community that there is this great school," said Liat Shalom, the chair of the OCAD Jewish student union. Shalom, 26, added that, to her knowledge, there has been only one other exhibit like this one, and it was several years ago.

She explained that the show would not only offer Jewish students exposure for their artwork, but "that it

would be a good experience for the students to bond as well."

The Jewish community at OCAD is not very large – Shalom estimates it at fewer than 50 students. But, she said with a laugh, she makes it her responsibility "to go out and try to find out where the Jewish students are hiding."

The artists she brought together for the show work in diverse art forms, including painting, photography and jewelry design. While not all the art had an overtly Jewish or Israeli theme, many pieces did deal with Jewish imagery.

A second-year graphic design student, Eitan Zohar, displayed an eye-catching piece called Sheer veh Shomeah, Hebrew for "song and listener," a colour laser print that formed the Hebrew letter shin from the shapes of a microphone and headphones.

In Shalom's own works, which she created this year as a Hillel and Julie M. Gallery Emerging Jewish Artist fellow, Israel plays an important role. The illustration and animation student's pieces included an Andy Warhol-inspired diptych of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as a watercolour painting of former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated in 1995.

Among the participating artists were two other Julie M. Gallery fellows, photographer Shlomi Amiga and painter Dov Smiley.

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"I feel that for most of us, we focus on subjects that in some way or another relate to our religion or our culture – it's something you can't avoid," said Shalom, who was born in Israel.

Despite the political figures that appear in her works, Shalom said her art is not meant to be political, but rather, is a result of her being affected by news from Israel while she was working on the pieces.

Julia Bernshtein, a 23-year-old environmental design student who helped organize the art show, agreed that Jewish and Israeli art doesn't have to be political. "We're talking about art here, not politics," she said.

Bernshtein, who is also Israeli, said that the exhibit will help people who are unfamiliar with Jewish artists see a different approach to art. "Judaism in general has a different mind frame and a different approach to a lot of things," she said.

Shalom said that she and Bernshtein made a point to invite many OCAD teachers to give them a chance to see "collectively, what Judaic art is."

For Bernshtein, the unique Jewish artistic attitude is centred on making works that stand out, something that certainly shone through in the exhibit. "We want to make something different, we want to make something unique."

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