

Steampunk and Innovation: A Teenage Artist's Exploration

From September 2024 to January 2025, the Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre (QEPCCC) in Oakville, a suburb of Toronto, Canada, hosted an extraordinary steampunk art exhibition. Drawing a wide audience of captivated viewers, the spotlight of the exhibition was on its central figure, 17-year-old Brenton Wang, a Chinese-Canadian high school student. Using steampunk aesthetics as his medium, Wang expressed profound reflections on environmentalism, technology, and humanity's future, delivering a visual and intellectual experience that left a lasting impression.

As a high school student, hosting a solo exhibition at QEPCCC, the largest public cultural and art space in Oakville, was no small feat. This venue attracts hundreds of community members daily, and securing such an opportunity required not only a distinctive artistic style but also exceptional creative expression. Wang's works, characterized by bold mechanical themes and thought-provoking subjects, broke barriers of age and artistic form, making his exhibition a standout success.

The exhibition, titled *Memories Across Time and Space*, featured 12 pieces that explored themes of environmentalism, human destiny, and the ethical implications of technology. Among the highlights was *The Final Button*, a piece

capturing the tense moment before catastrophe. Interwoven mechanical pipelines symbolized a collapsing order, while a stark white light hinted at the irreversible destruction of a nuclear disaster. The rough texture of wooden elements intensified the chaotic atmosphere, serving as a sobering reminder of the dangers of technological misuse.

Another key piece, *The Dyson Sphere*, was a collage constructed from electronic waste, envisioning a futuristic energy solution. This work conveyed an optimistic message: environmentalism and technological innovation are not mutually exclusive but can complement each other to advance humanity. Viewers were drawn not only to the visual complexity of the piece but also to its call for sustainable resource use. Meanwhile, *2124* presented a chilling reflection on the aftermath of nuclear war. Its distorted cityscapes and tattered flags symbolized the relentless destruction of conflict, while simultaneously expressing a profound yearning for peace.

Beyond steampunk art, Wang actively explores the integration of technology and art. For example, he addressed the challenges of appreciating traditional Chinese ink scrolls through virtual reality. By reconstructing *A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains* into a virtual space, he allowed viewers to "walk into" the painting for an immersive experience. This innovation breathed new life into traditional culture and earned

Wang third place at the BASEF science and technology fair.

He also utilized VR technology to create a virtual theater for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, making a high school literature class more engaging and interactive. Wang believes that technology is not the end goal of art but a tool to enhance artistic experiences. This cross-disciplinary perspective gives him a distinctive creative edge.

Looking ahead, Wang has clear aspirations. He aims to continue his artistic journey in university while delving into more interdisciplinary fields that bridge art, technology, and humanities. He believes that a great artist requires not only a strong foundation in the humanities but also a keen understanding of emerging technologies. Through innovative artistic approaches, Wang hopes to spread environmental awareness and inspire broader discussions about humanity's future.

Using steampunk as his medium, Brenton Wang examines the future while reflecting on the present, offering audiences an extraordinary blend of visual allure and intellectual depth. This young artist demonstrates that art is not merely a form of expression but a powerful catalyst for societal thought and progress.

By Lin Peng
LJI Reporter

