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## Nassagaweya sculptor gets coveted spot in show

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Five years ago, local sculptor Candice Raquel Lee moved home. True, she'd never lived in Canada before, but when she left her native New York to take her place as a proud Canadian, it just felt right -- like a piece of clay moulded into the work of art it was destined to be.

"I feel like I've always been here," Lee said. "It's where I'm meant to be."

She broached the subject of moving here with her husband, Chris, shortly after they were married and before long they re-located to London, Ont. and then, three years ago, to Nassagaweya -- a far cry from the busyness of Manhattan.

"I love it here. The neighbours are friendly. In Manhattan it's all rush, rush, rush and there's no time to say hello," she said.

Lee's positive immigrant experience culminated in a bronze sculpture she titled Emergent.

It was her first work of art since moving to Canada, and the piece that started her well on her way to becoming a bona fide classical sculptor.

The piece depicts a man's torso with a woman's face emerging from his chest.

"(It) reflects my own condition as an emerging sculptor, breaking out of the metaphorical body I knew before and remaking myself," she explained.

It was her newfound country that allowed her to morph into that artist, she said.

Now, Emergent has landed Lee a spot in an art show at the Varley Art Gallery in Markham.

The show's entitled Canadian Artists Without Borders and features a wide variety of artists new to Canada from 15 countries of origin.

The show started January 28 and will continue until May 13.

Out of hundreds who entered, Lee was chosen by judges along with 21 other artists to participate.

"I'm very proud to be in it (the show) and to show off Canada's new talent," Lee told The Champion.



The classical work of Candice Lee earned her a spot in a Markham art show that chooses from a few hundred entries.

One of the best things about Canada is the fact women of various skin tones are recognized for who they are and not what they look like, Lee said.

While living in the United States, Lee said she felt like she couldn't blend in because she wasn't white. Here, she said, she can be "invisible" -- in a good way.

Lee has no plans to leave anytime soon.

"People say I should go back to the States to sell more art," she said, explaining Canadians are more "frugal" in their art purchases. "But I'm not going back. I'd rather sell less (here)."

Emergent is about more than Lee's experiences becoming an artist and a Canadian. It's also about the more universal theme of emerging as a woman.

"It's not just the immigrant experience. It's a woman's experience too," she explained, adding women's issues cross borders.

Lee's attitude about the beauty of the female body and the power that lies within are visible for all to see through her bronze sculptures, most of which are nude figures.

"It's important to portray women as powerful and beautiful," she said.

The process of creating a bronze sculpture is painstaking and has many steps.

First, Lee sculpts a piece out of clay. Once it dries, she takes it to a foundry, where a rubber mould is created. Wax is poured into that mould, and is taken out of the rubber.

The wax is then dipped in wet ceramic, heated, melted out and the remaining piece coated in bronze. Finally, a patina is applied to colour the metal.

It's definitely an exciting time for Lee as an artist.

Not only is she showing at the Varley Art Gallery, but from March 15 to 18, Lee's entire collection will be on display at the Toronto Art Expo at the Toronto Metro Convention Centre.

It's the largest art show in the country, with more than 270 artists participating.

Becoming a sculptor wasn't what Lee had planned, although she's been dabbling in the medium since she was six years old.

Back in the U.S. she was a teacher, but she realized it wasn't what she wanted to do all her life.

Sculpting, she said, made her feel free and was certainly something of which she didn't think she'd tire.

Lee said she owes a lot of her newfound freedom to her new country.

"Canada allowed me to grow as a person," she said, adding, "For the first time, I don't see myself as a person of colour. I see myself as a person."

To see more of Lee's work, visit [www.candiceraquel.com](http://www.candiceraquel.com).

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