

Museum of Dufferin presents awards to area photographers in Home and Heritage exhibition

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The Museum of Dufferin has announced the winners of its 2026 Home & Heritage Photography Exhibition, celebrating images that explore the meaning of home, culture, tradition and community through the lens of Canadian photographers.

Presented in the museum's Silo Gallery, the juried exhibition invited photographers to submit work reflecting the theme of 'Home & Heritage.' Organizers encouraged artists to examine what home means across cultures, including traditions, food, family, community and place. The exhibition features selected photographs and runs through Sept. 26.

This year's Best in Show Award was presented to *Carrying the Song* by Johnny Gonzalez.

'I feel incredibly honoured to be given this award,' Gonzalez said. 'I honestly wasn't expecting it. To be chosen from so many, to have my work on display is incredible, let alone to be awarded.'

Gonzalez never originally planned to get into photography. In high school, he took a photography class. At first, he wasn't serious about it, but over time he came to enjoy it. Gonzalez now shoots primarily portraits and fine art.

'I took the class thinking it was going to be an easy credit, like how difficult could it be?' he said. 'I ended up falling in love with it, and I've been shooting ever since, professionally for five years now.'

The Youth Photography Award was presented to Vathmee Walakulu Arachchi. She said the experience has been deeply gratifying as she is new to the photography scene.

'I'm really excited about all of it,' she said. 'I kind of just came into this not thinking I would even see my photography in the museum, but to get an award was really enlightening and fulfilling because I've only recently started doing photography. It's going to be great motivation to keep going with it.'

The Juror's Choice Award went to *Sweet Pea* by Rene Frost, who said she never expected to win. She credits her kids with getting her interested in photography.

'It all started with my kids really wanting to document special occasions,' she said. 'I started photography after my third was born, and it just evolved from there.'

'And now, this award is just crazy. I didn't expect for the picture to win an award, but I'm happy,' Frost added.

Selina Mezzatesta received the Emerging Photographer Award for Emerging Presence.

'It feels just great to get this award,' she said. 'I worked really hard on this. I brainstormed what I wanted to do for the exhibition, and seeing everything up on the wall was extremely rewarding. It was a great experience for me.'

Mezzatesta started photography in Grade 11 as part of a graphic design course, before going to university, where her classes included photography. She credits those experiences with helping her develop a more creative side.

The broader exhibition was designed to showcase diverse perspectives on identity, belonging and heritage while highlighting both

local and national stories.

Submitted photographs were required to connect to the Home & Heritage theme and fall within categories such as culture and community, traditions and celebrations, food, people, or images captured in Dufferin County and across Canada.

The photographs were reviewed by a panel of peer assessors, with museum staff serving as administrators.

The Home & Heritage exhibition reflects the Museum of Dufferin's broader mission of preserving and sharing the stories, people and cultures that shape Dufferin County and beyond.

Through exhibitions, educational programming and community partnerships, the museum aims to connect visitors with both local history and contemporary creative expression.

The exhibition opened with an awards presentation on May 30 and remains on display at the museum throughout the summer, offering visitors an opportunity to experience a collection of photographs that examine the many ways Canadians define home and celebrate their heritage.