



The Vanguard Youth Arts Collective Presents:

SPOT ON!

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Interview with Dante Bresolin

Edited by Meaghan Sweeney

The Vanguard Youth Arts Collective are a group of creatively driven youth who act as a voice for an emerging generation of the arts within the Windsor Essex region.

'Spot On!' is Vanguard's artist interview series edited by members Meaghan Sweeney and Alexei Ungurenaşu. These interviews offer a spotlight for emerging and established local artists who work in various media to discuss and promote their past and current art projects.

Dante Bresolin (they/them) is an emerging multimedia artist based in the territory of the Three-Fires Confederacy (Waawiiyaatanong, also known as Windsor, Ontario). A life-long artist and nature lover, they are self-taught in several mediums including traditional painting, photography, and digital illustration. Dante's background in ecological research lends an accuracy to their art, which depicts local ecosystems and species at risk. Their work highlights seldom seen critters of Southern Ontario, capturing their beauty and engaging viewers to learn more about them. Throughout their studies in Integrative Biology at the University of Windsor, Dante shared their art at public outreach events like Science on Tap, and led Science Meets Art (SMart), a student-based science communication initiative. Their artwork has also been showcased at youth art shows and accompanied presentations at research conferences. They continue to create while they work in the interdisciplinary space, bridging science and visual arts. While previously working at a smaller scale, Dante hopes to share their work in larger collections and exhibits.



Photo of Dante by Shayenna Nolan (2022)

How did you get started in the arts?

Art has always been a part of my life. My mother was an artist, so I was encouraged to draw growing up. My mom passed away when I was young, but growing up with her paintings and supplies around the house left its mark. When I was a kid, I would look at animal books and sketch out the birds; so clearly not much has changed! Teachers would literally take out stacks of doodles from my desk in grade school. As soon as I had a little iPod Touch, I was photographing the world around me, until I got my first camera. Then in high school I got into painting. I'd say those are my two main mediums these days — photography and painting. Just like my mom.



"Azure Summer" (2022): Digital illustration

Inspired by a trip to Point Pelee National Park, I highlighted the endangered Prothonotary warbler and the swamps they rely on. That day, so many small blue butterflies (summer azures) fluttered around, so I had to include them.

What does your approach to the process of creating entail?

The hardest part of creating is probably deciding where to even start! I like to begin with a bit of research, just to make sure my subjects can be found in the same place and time. I always consult references, whether that's photos from the internet or drawings from vintage field guides. I'm a bit crazy about detail: I start off with a sketch, build colour with watercolour, and then perfect everything with acrylic. Sometimes I go as far as digitally rendering the final product for clean edges. This process is really demanding, so I

try to reserve it for pieces I really care about. I try to keep sketching in my own personal time, but a painting just seems to happen when it happens. Most of the time I paint at weird hours of the night, in a state of a hyper focus.

How does your background in science influence your work?

My work with stream biomonitoring means I spend a lot of time looking at things under the microscope. In some stream insects I look at, the difference between families can be as small as the number of hairs or the shape of their legs. Because I have a trained eye for these kinds of details, I like to think my work is accurate in how I draw organisms.

When I draw a nature scene, nothing is random; I choose what plants will go with what birds in a way that best represents where you'd find them in the wild.

Illustrated are several species at risk that depend on the sandspit savannahs of Point Pelee National Park.



"Sandspit Savannah" (2021): Watercolour and acrylic on paper, digitally rendered



"Caddisfly" (2021): Digital art

Caddisfly larvae like these construct portable cases out of wood, leaves, and their own silk.

How is your approach to art changing?

It's definitely an ongoing change, but I'm trying to focus less on perfecting details and getting more into backgrounds, drawing humans, and just embracing the artistic process — that is, the chaos of being an artist. Overall, I'm just trying to think less and create more.



"Skinks and coreopsis" (2020): Digital illustration



"Cicada and clover" (2020): Digital illustration

Inspired by printmaking, I illustrated Ontario's only native lizards with their tails entwined, bordered with coreopsis, a native wildflower (left), and a black and white illustration depicts a cicada, cicada killer wasp, and clovers (right).

What is your favorite part of being a creator in Windsor?

I'm incredibly fortunate as a settler to be on this land — the territory of the Three Fires Confederacy, also known as Waawiiyaatanong. I live surrounded by the remains of wetland, savannah, and forest, where you can find biodiversity like nowhere else. Not many people know that we have native lizards, orchids, and cacti, so being able to highlight them through my art has been amazing.

That same wonderful diversity also applies to the communities I'm thankful to have shared space in. I find myself endlessly inspired by local BIPOC and queer creators that share their stories through their art. I think — or at least hope — Windsor's culture is

slowly shifting away from a white-dominated automotive hellscape to a more connected community, and newcomers and children of immigrants are at the forefront of that.

A belted kingfisher rests on a cottonwood branch.

What are some challenges you face being based in Windsor Essex?

As a nature artist, I'm really grateful for the pockets of wilderness we have locally, but it's just not enough. Sure, I can draw species I've never seen from pictures on the internet, but there's something about creating from a live individual subject that gives a painting life. And there's so many cool species that our small parks just can't support. A lot of this is because Windsor's dominant culture is blue-collar, work, go-home-and-do-nothing. It's a city designed for cars — not for people, and definitely not for nature. Thankfully, I think this is changing.



"Halcyon" (2020): Mixed media



"Haven at dusk" (2020): Digital illustration

A mossy log lays surrounded by ferns and fungus over a dark background. A whippoorwill rests and cecropia moths flutter.

How can readers further support local creators in Windsor?

The most obvious answer is to pay us! Whether that's commissioning or buying our work, supporting creators financially pays for our time and materials and allows us to create more. If you can't pay us, just resharing, crediting, and engaging with our content can help get our work out there.

Showing up to shows in person or, if you're a business owner, holding space for creators to share their work is also invaluable.



"On the Back of a Sandpiper" (2021): Watercolour and acrylic on paper, digitally rendered

This piece shows a sandpiper with crayfish and snails on its back, reminding us of the interdependence of species. Shorebirds feed on invertebrates, changing entire aquatic communities in the process.

What are potential projects you dream of being able to create in the future if there were absolutely no limitations?

There's so much to explore! I'd probably jump around with mediums a lot if I had no limitations. Learning to work with natural materials is definitely up there on my list — like making my own paint from natural pigments or making textiles from foraged fibres. I make art out of my reverence for nature, so using materials as close to their raw form seems like the best way to honour that.

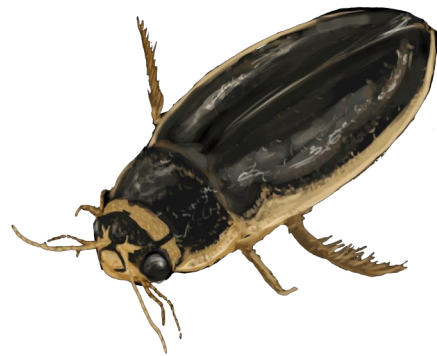
I also want to branch out to explore more human topics. I'd love to use my unique perspective to explore concepts like gender and mental illness, and I think these resonate a lot more with general audiences than nature-inspired work alone.

Are there any artists you would love to collaborate with?

Not necessarily artists, but I'd love to collaborate with organizations, parks, and initiatives that support conservation. Using my science background and art skills to amplify programs that protect species at risk is something I've always dreamed of doing.



"Perlidae" (2021): Digital art



"Dysticidae" (2021): Digital illustration

Left: A stonefly nymph in the family Perlidae shows off its tiger-like colouration, indicating that it is a predator. Right: This drawing is a part of a larger collection where I illustrated aquatic insects you might find in streams.

We thank Dante for being our guest in the Spot On! interview series, and we look forward to seeing their work with local nature centres and art galleries!

If you would like to see more of Dante's work, you can find them on Instagram @danteabreso.

For more artist interviews and other Windsor-based projects, follow the Vanguard Youth Arts Collective on Facebook and Instagram @vanguard.collective and stay tuned for our next issue as well as our first print volume of interviews coming out this fall!