

'Art has always been a part of me'

'Never look down on anybody unless you are helping them up'

The words of Jesse Jackson, and also the ones which Angelika Sowul uses to describe her exhibition at the Backstage Theatre.

Working on the theme of 'Masks', Angelika, a native of Mragowo (previously Sensuburg), Poland, opened her exhibition at the beginning of October, displaying photography and drawings and even performing a story through the medium of contemporary dance.

Speaking about the chosen theme, Angelika explained; "Life impels me to think [about] how people behave and how they react in some situations.

"In these days, people are engrossed in a vicious circle of the rat race when at the same time they forget about their natural response to human suffering. Sometimes people get lost and it is important to remind them that there is love, friendship and the power of goodness.

"I believe that every one of us is wearing a mask," she continued. "Many times people like to judge other people by looking only at their mask. But in most cases they are very misleading."

"We are thinking in stereotypes where people have their mask to manipulate others, to use others, to be on the top, to be fake. In some situations that might be true, but do we have to put all people into one dirty bag?"

Angelika has met many people in her life, and she has seen how people wear their masks to hide broken hearts, feelings, problems and often, health issues. She added that; "in the social media era we are getting shallow and [we're] not really bothering to look deeper into another person's soul. Wouldn't it be brave to take off someone else's mask and look through to its heart?"

Angelika's love for art began at a very young stage. Describing her home town as being "located in a beautiful land of lakes and forest," Angelika pointed out that many natives became painters, and she believes that this is largely due to the environment and the area's 'magical' landscapes.

"My mother told me many stories that I always drew something rather than playing with the typical toys," she smiled, going on to say, "Art has always been a part of me, I believe art was born with me and because my whole family are very artistic and creative people I must have art in my blood."

A self-taught artist, Angelika studied International Connection in Higher University but kept art as a hobby. Arriving in Ireland in 2008, sadly, Angelika stopped creating to focus on settling in.

"I came to Longford around 5 years ago and I felt burned out working in the Bank of America in Carrick-on-Shannon so I decided to leave the job and I started to think of myself more and open myself to the world."

Admitting that she had been through hard times trying to find her path in life, Angelika happily revealed that she fell in love with her now husband, who helped her to understand herself and choose the way of life she was looking for. It is her husband whom she credits with helping her to get back to art.

"Now I can tell that I am the happiest person in the world!" she exclaimed.

Angelika, who has since graduated from Templemichael College's Art course, also expresses herself through dance, which she has been doing since she was thirteen years old. Part of a school cheerleading group, Angelika went on to set up a dancing group with her friends.

Though she attended a few classes, Angelika's dance, like her art, is very much self-taught. Though she always wanted to join ballet classes, none were available, so she focused on hip-hop and contemporary, the latter of which she is extremely invested in at the moment.

Acknowledging Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy and Photographer Shelley Corcoran for their invaluable help and support, Angelika hopes that her exhibition has shown people the real Angelika, and she concluded by saying; "I hope I will persuade at least one person that before making any judgement about another person we should start with ourselves first."

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