

Labor of love brings grad back to complete mural

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Take it from T. L. Kennedy art teacher Lisa Van Loon. Once Avanindra Utukuri has an artistic notion in his head, there's no talking to him.

Now in his second year at the University of Toronto, Utukuri spent part of this summer completing a massive environmental mural he started during his last year at TLK.

It covers nine, four-foot by eight-foot wall panels and takes up most of the north end of the auditorium.

And if the size isn't daunting enough, Utukuri completed the massive mural of an Amazon river scene in splashes of exotic hues — despite the fact he's partially color-blind.

Third mural

Throughout his high school years, Utukuri excelled in art classes. According to Van Loon, "he is really quite exceptional."

He had already completed a musical mural in Grade 10 that is found in the school's music room and he followed that up in Grade 12 with the large mural of Toronto on the wall leading into the auditorium.

"There used to be two very old murals on the wall (in the auditorium) showing a bunch of historical scenes," he said. "That's when I decided I wanted to do something that would be more current, more in touch with what the students are thinking about today."

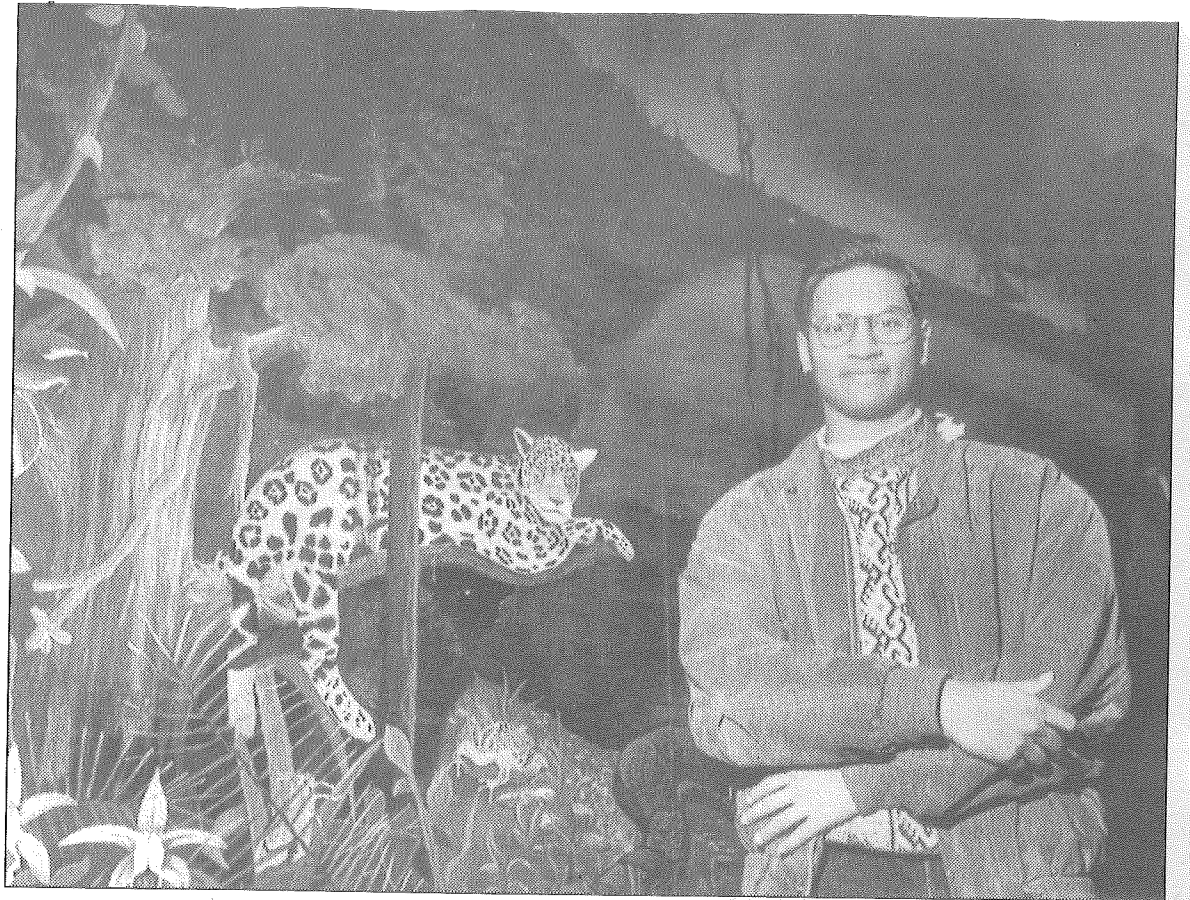
Crediting Van Loon for her unwavering support, he tackled the student council and the administration. There were reasons why the mural should not have been created, but Utukuri argued his case and eventually won.

"There was a lot of money involved for the paints and people were worried that I might go to university and not complete the project," he said.

"It was always going to be an environmental mural, but over the last two years, it kept evolving. It started out as a nice scene with blue skies and clouds but it became the Amazon rain forest. I guess I've actually repainted this three times."

He estimates he put 3,000 hours into the work, which doesn't count the continuing assistance of other students. The hardest part was making sure something like a hanging vine trailing down across three panels would line up.

The other drawback was the artist's color-blindness, particularly with blues and greens, yet there is no hint of it in the mural. This summer, he spent a month fine tuning the work and helping with its assembly.



Avanindra Utukuri stands in front of the massive environmental mural he completed after more than two years and 3,000 hours of work. It hangs on the north wall of the T. L. Kennedy Secondary School auditorium.

Staff photo by Fred Loek