

# WILD COLOUR PORTRAITS

by RUSSELL THOMAS

November 10, 2016 - January 28, 2017

MacDonald Island Community Art Gallery

# FEATURE WALL



**Gandhi**  
16" x 16"  
acrylic on canvas

From Sherry  
Duncan



**David Bowie**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From John and  
Denise Evans



**BB King**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Paskal  
Family



**Dalai Lama**  
16" x 16"  
acrylic on canvas

From Sherry  
Duncan



**Gene Wilder**  
36" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

not available for purchase



**Gene Wilder**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Chocolates and  
Candlelight



**Walter White**  
15" x 30"  
acrylic on canvas

not available for purchase



**Bob Marley**  
16" x 16"  
acrylic on  
canvas

From Zachary  
Winters



**Elsie Yanik**  
60" x 96"  
acrylic on shed

Photo of the mural  
located in the alley  
between Hill and  
Demers Drives

As I have grown older, I've become very good at "listening to the wind", the messages and cues offered up by the universe. The wind clearly told me to paint a mural on the back of my shed after I discovered that it had been tagged. At that point, it had been over a decade since I had painted anything large. Elsie Yanik was my first subject, inspired by an image taken by an amazing photographer named Joey Podlubny. We had fun with that first one as Elsie and the media came to see it, as did others, taking photos and sharing them with the hashtag #selfiewithelsie. Justin Trudeau came to get his selfie, too. Elsie started this crazy ride, and I will be forever grateful.

Dorothy McDonald, former Chief of the Fort McKay First Nation, was second - another large mural. Paintings on scrap pieces of wood and old album covers followed. I just didn't want to stop. Eventually I did a colourful portrait of Jazz pianist Oscar Peterson and put it on Facebook asking if anyone was interested in buying it. Surprisingly, more than a few people did, and it sold for \$300 to a former colleague now living in the United States. The first and second commissions came in around that time and I began to see a path emerge from the fog that I didn't realize was there.

Having gone through brief spurts of creativity throughout my life, I promised myself that no matter how busy I got, I would commit to doing at least one painting a week. I've stayed true to that commitment, producing over 400 original works in just over two years.

In painting subjects, human and animal, I've learned that all personalities have features that are keys to how they are differentiated from others. Sometimes it is a line in the face, a swoop of hair, the shape of the nose or a glint in the eye. My process is very simple. I do my best to honour what I am seeing on the black and white source image. It is surprising how a melange of colour, not normally seen in the face or hair, can communicate the essence of a soul.

This collection contains a portion of the works that reside in Fort McMurray. Many others have scattered across Canada and throughout the U.S. There are several essential elements to these portraits: colour, texture, time and story.

The colours have evolved a lot since I began and will continue to evolve in the years to come. The texture of the paintings has also evolved. The boldness of the line and the splatters of my early period have been supplanted by blending and layers. In terms of time, some of my best work has happened very quickly, just a couple of hours of painting resulting in a completed portrait. Finally, each painting is a story. I look forward to sharing a few of those during the course of this exhibition.

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# THE MASTERS



**Pablo Picasso**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor Donald  
Collection



**Pablo Picasso**  
12" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor Donald Collection



**Pablo Picasso**  
10" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the  
Taylor Donald  
Collection



**Baltus**  
16" x 16"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor  
Donald Collection



**Auguste Renoir**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor  
Donald Collection



**Henri Matisse**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor  
Donald Collection



**Claude Monet**  
12" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor  
Donald Collection



**Salvador Dali**  
12" x 12"  
acrylic on  
canvas

on loan from  
the Taylor  
Donald  
Collection



**Vincent van Gogh**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor  
Donald Collection



**Andy Warhol**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Bryce  
Kumka family



**Jackson Pollock**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Taylor  
Donald Collection

This entire section could be called The Taylor Donald Collection. Save for one piece - Andy Warhol - all of this painting masters are on loan from Taylor, a Suncor employee who reached out to me one year ago wanting to get back into painting. Workshops that I had scheduled just didn't work with his work rotation so I finally said "come over whenever it fits; I paint a lot."

He came over and we started painting together in the cramped confines of my carpentry shop turned art studio. We collaborated on the first few pieces that he did: he did 95-percent of the work and he had me step in for a few minutes near the end - two of those are in this exhibition. Then he did a portrait of his grandfather, all on his own. It was beautiful.

In the process of painting together, we have become friends. Taylor and his wife Lindsey actually evacuated to the same camp that my wife Heather and son Ben ended up at on May 3rd. It was a great comfort to me, evacuated to the south, that he was there with them on that night.

Taylor has a passion for art and artists that is inspiring. His parents took him to various places in Europe when he was younger and he was able to visit key landmarks of these great painters and see some of their original works in major galleries. The fact that he is interested and investing in my art is humbling.

It is fascinating that Andy Warhol is the lone outlier, but appropriate that he is part of Bryce Kumka's collection. He has some coveted Warhol prints and my portrait is an appropriate complement.

Strange story: I dreamt about Andy Warhol once in my life. I rarely remember what happens during my nocturnal adventures, but that morning I distinctly recalled my interaction with the pop art icon in my dreams. I turned on my computer to discover that he had died that very night.

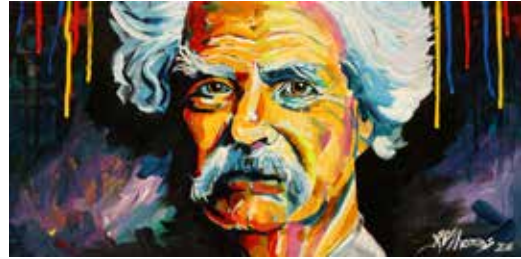
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# WRITERS, A COMPOSER AND REAL AMAZING PEOPLE



**Mark Twain**  
15" x 30"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for purchase  
\$625 (+gst)



**Beethoven**  
12" x 18"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for purchase  
\$400 (+gst)



**Mathew "Penguin" Whitehead and Billy Janvier**  
18" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Bryce Kumka Family



**Samuel Rossi Deranger**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Faye Adby



**The Carla Memory Project**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From the  
Bryce Kumka Family



**Bruno**  
20" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From Mike Allen



**Richard Janvier**  
18" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Janvier Family



**David Cardinal**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Centre of  
Hope



**Ernest Hemingway**  
10" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for purchase  
\$400 (+gst)



**Charles Bukowski**  
10" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for purchase  
\$400 (+gst)

I am fascinated by personality and the soul of a person that emerges with a painting. Ernest Hemingway and Mark Twain were renowned novelists, but intriguing characters. Charles Bukowski was an irascible creative genius who was called a "laureate of American lowlife" by Time magazine. Beethoven was a deep well of expression and musical magnificence. These are four examples of painting I did purely for fun, and as a response to inspiration.

Each of the remaining portraits of this wall hold great meaning to me.

The portrait of Bruno was largely complete when I asked my son Ben, then 11 years old, what he thought of it.

"It's missing something," said the real artist in our family.

"What?" I asked.

"Splatters," he said. "It needs some splatters."

"Cool," I said. "Come with me. I'd like you to do the splatters."

His instincts and colour choices brought the piece to life and sparked hundreds of conversations about this homeless man from my hometown.

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# REAL AMAZING PEOPLE



**Lauren - Courage and Heart**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Stemman Family



**Scott and Michelle Germain**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Germain Family



**Sandy Bowman**  
36" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Sandy Bowman Family



**The Harty Boys**  
36" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Haritigan Family



**Bo Cooper**  
18" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

A gift to the Bo Cooper Family



**Mike Paskal**  
18" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Paskal Family



**RhiAnna and Elliya**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Cooper Family



**Randy Stefanizyn and Grandkids**  
36" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Stefanizyn Family

We installed Bo Cooper's portrait on the same day that he passed away after his epic battle with cancer. He inspired a community, province and country in a way that we'll never forget. His portrait happened live at an incredible event in Anzac held just days before Christmas in 2015 that raised over \$100,000 to help Bo get the cutting edge therapy he needed. I went back to it when we were allowed to return to our community after the fire. In terms of real amazing people, he was definitely one of them.

Mike Paskal asked me to paint his father, also Mike, wearing a hospital gown holding a dog. I had wanted to paint him wearing a tux, as he was a renowned ballroom dancer.

"No," said Mike. "I want you to paint this moment."

"Okay," I said. I found out later why.

Mike had asked his dad if there was anything special that he could do for him, he was in the hospital and the prognosis was not good.

"I'd like to hold a puppy," said Mike Sr. "I haven't held a puppy since I was a boy."

Mike sent out a message to his Facebook friends asking to borrow a puppy. He got one and smuggled it into the hospital by hiding it in his coat and brought it to his dad. The smile on his face as he held that puppy and felt its tiny heart beating is a beautiful moment. I was honoured to capture it and present it to Mike Sr. surrounded by family in his hospital room. It was with him until the day he passed.

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# FURRY FRIENDS



**Finnigan**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Brad and  
Maryanne Gillam



**Mac**  
12" x 12"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Hannah  
Family



**Wood Bison**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Ronald MacNeill  
Sun Taxi



**Toda and Pete**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Pete Potipcoe



**Emma, Grannie, Lilly, Lola, Roxy**  
36" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Gavin & Nicole Kopp



**Spirit Bear**  
30" x 40"  
acrylic on canvas

From Wood Buffalo Productions



**The Raven**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Andy and Isabel Carter



**Horse of the  
Class**  
18" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for  
purchase with  
proceeds to the  
Clearwater Horse  
Club  
\$750

I didn't set out to paint dogs, cats and various other animals; but inevitably I was asked to do one, which opened up a whole new creative line for me. I'm so glad that Finnigan is among the animal paintings featured in this show. He was very important for me.

I had hit a wall. How was I going to apply my colourful style to this beautiful dog? I kept getting drawn into his actually colouring and couldn't get beyond it. That was when I discovered an animal portrait artist from Louisville, Kentucky named Eric Staub. One brief glance at a fun and loose portrait of a dane threw me over the wall. It helped me get to the place of having fun with colour and Finnigan's portrait was the result. Dozer, Bella, Boo, Cleo and many others followed.

During our evacuation I sat down for an afternoon of painting with my niece Julia and did the "Hopeful Horse". The "Raven" followed shortly after in June, as did the "Gorilla", "Curious Cow" and "Horse of the Class". The first and the last are featured in this exhibit, with the "Horse of the Class" being sold to raise money for the Clearwater Horse Club and their rebuilding efforts after the fire ripped through their facility south of town.

I look forward to continue working my way through the animal kingdom - there is no shortage of subjects.

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# THE MUSICIANS



**The Supremes**  
36" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Motown Lounge collection at Northstar Ford



**Gord Downie**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Ron Finch



**Dan Tulk**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Dan Tulk



**Resilience and Courage**  
30" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From yet to be determined



**Ron Hynes**  
12" x 12"  
acrylic on canvas

From Steve Auty



**Angus Young**  
11" x 14"  
acrylic on canvas

From Chris Baker



**Jim Morrison**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Ken Anderson



**Louis Armstrong**  
24" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From Jeanne and Scott Broughton



**Lionel Ritchie**  
24" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Motown Lounge Collection at Northstar Ford

I have painted a lot of musicians. A broad cross section are featured here, one from my early splatter period (Keith Richards), several from the Motown Collection at Northstar Ford (there are 11 others).

Stu Marchand, a local musician and friend, asked me to paint Ron Hynes the morning we heard that he had died. One of Canada's greatest singer songwriters, I couldn't refuse the request. Little did I know that there was a strong Fort McMurray connection to Mr. Hynes. My friend Steve is married to Ron's wife's sister. I'm so grateful that we can share this portrait with a community that has deep roots in eastern Canada.

Dan Tulk asked me to paint his album cover. I love this guy, the energy he brings to his music, and the work that he does with students.

Colin Hartigan hatched the idea for me to paint the powerful image of Gord Downie with the Jaws t-shirt. There is an unmistakable energy about this piece that resonated with fans from across Canada. It also became one of my most successful charity pieces, raising \$9,000 for the United Way's Community Campaign.

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# THE ENTERTAINERS



**Bruce Lee**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Sandy Bowman



**Three Hombres**  
**Ben Johnson, Sam Elliott &**  
**John Wayne**  
15" x 30"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Shantz Family



**Oprah Winfrey**  
16" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Shantz Family



**Robert De Niro**  
12" x 12"  
acrylic on canvas

From Ken Anderson



**Al Pacino**  
24" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for purchase  
\$700 (+gst)



**The Directors Series**  
**John Huston, Quentin Tarantino, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, Kevin Smith, &**  
**Alfred Hitchcock**  
acrylic on canvas

From Wood Buffalo Productions



**Don Cherry**  
18" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Shantz Family

Six of the portraits in the section are owned by Wood Buffalo Productions. They are some of the most influential film directors to Michael, Jon and Matt - local filmmakers who have shared their passion to help our community in so many ways. I've felt a real kinship with these guys as their creative careers have taken off at the same time that mine did.

In the middle of this section is a portrait of Al Pacino. I think he is one of the greatest actors of the past 50 years. Next to him is Robert De Niro, another great. Together, they made The Godfather and The Godfather Part II absolute classics.

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# LEADERS AND INNOVATORS



**Robin Williams**  
12" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

on loan from Kent Lissack,  
Calgary



**Ali**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Sandy Bowman



**Gordie Howe**  
12" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From Ken  
Anderson



**Jim Carter and Eric Newell**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Marty and Dennine Giles  
Northstar Ford



**Warren Buffet**  
24" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From Nadine Allen



**Marty Giles**  
18" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

A gift to Marty  
and Dennine  
Giles



**Rick George and Dee Parkinson**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From Marty and Dennine Giles  
Northstar Ford



**Peter Lougheed**  
24" x 36"  
acrylic on canvas

From  
The Redpoll Centre



**Donald J. Trump**  
12" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Shantz Family



**Abraham Lincoln**  
16" x 16"  
acrylic on canvas

Available for  
purchase  
\$450 (+gst)



**Chief Dan George**  
24" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From Kelsey Janvier



**Chief Joseph**  
24" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From Ken Bowie



**Chief Red Cloud**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Kelsey  
Janvier



**Nellie McLung**  
36" x 48"  
acrylic on canvas

From the Bryce Kumka Family



**Nelson Mandela**  
20" x 20"  
acrylic on canvas

From Julio Florez



**Albert Einstein**  
15" x 30"  
acrylic on canvas

From Julio Florez



**Mother Theresa**  
24" x 24"  
acrylic on canvas

From The Redpoll  
Centre

These are leaders and influencers who have had a profound effect on the world. I think it is fitting that Marty Giles is among these amazing men and women. He has had a substantial impact in this community and on my art career. He and Dennine own more of my pieces than anyone else. They are scattered throughout their beautiful dealership at the bottom of Confederation Drive. Marty was the first to ask me to do a live painting event for charity. That flash of inspiration has resulted in dozens of live paintings that have raised tens of thousands of dollars for a variety of charities and causes.

I'm so pleased that the original Robin Williams painting came back to Fort McMurray for this exhibition. Its owner, or "custodian" - as he likes to call himself - is Kent Lissack. The co-founder of Bracelets For Buildings was able to ship it from Calgary before leaving for Cambodia where he is building houses for the homeless. Talk about leadership.

The Robin Williams portrait was done in those surreal hours when the world was reacting to the news of his sudden passing. It helped spark an important dialogue about mental health and remains one of the consistent favourites.