

Painting gives photographer new perspectives

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Wayne Leidenfrost's paintings are the kind of scenes you'd like to set up a picnic in: colourful flower fields and winding paths through the woods.

But though the subjects may be bright, peaceful hideaways, they're not painted with a peaceful touch.

"It's very aggressive," said Leidenfrost of his painting technique. "Big brush strokes and stuff. I almost attack the canvas."

He also breaks an average of two brushes per painting.

For this Lynn Valley artist, whose paintings often draw inspiration from North Shore spots like Rice Lake, painting is a stress-release. When he shows signs of grumpiness, his wife often sends him to his studio - a few hours later, he said, he emerges feeling better.

"It's therapy," he said, adding, "not that I need therapy."

The painting also serves to balance the more circumscribed world of his day job, as a photographer for The Province newspaper in Vancouver, where he has worked for 30 years.

"Newspapers tend to give you a really sort of raw sense of reality, which isn't always a good thing," said Leidenfrost. Though this perspective can be good in the long run, he said, "The painting allows me to step back from that."

One of Leidenfrost's paintings is currently featured at Art Works in Vancouver, as part of the gallery's 25th anniversary Surviving, Thriving & Growing exhibition, which runs until July 8. The exhibit features the works of 46 artists, and aims to raise \$10,000 for the Canadian Cancer Society.

His greatest hope, when people buy his work, is that they will continue to see surprises in it - shocks of purple they didn't notice before, or shapes and faces that emerge over time.

"I want people to be able to look at a piece for years and find new things," he said. "I don't want the work to be boring."

With the acrylic paints he uses, Leidenfrost can paint and repaint a single scene, layering and adding complexity to the canvas.

A painter since the age of 12, Leidenfrost hasn't always chosen nature as his muse. He dabbled in abstract art, going along with a popular perception that this was more "serious" artwork.

Inspired by the Impressionist painters, he transitioned to garden scenes, thinking, "I'm just going to do what I want to do, and I don't care if people look at it and go 'that's not serious art,' because it's my art."

That's the great thing about art, he said - getting to do whatever you want. And in the process, he hopes to bring a little light and happiness to peoples' homes.

"I just want to do pieces that kind of make people feel good," he said. ". . . They're not pieces that change the world, or alert people to starving kids in Ethiopia or anything like that. They're landscapes, and that's basically what they are."

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photo: Cindy Goodman

Province photographer Wayne Leidenfrost has been painting most of his life. The Lynn Valley resident is part of a group show at Art Works (225 Smithe St., Vancouver) celebrating the gallery's 25th anniversary. The Surviving, Thriving and Growing exhibit runs until July 8.

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