

# Money & Wealth

MONTREAL



## Good *Vibrations*

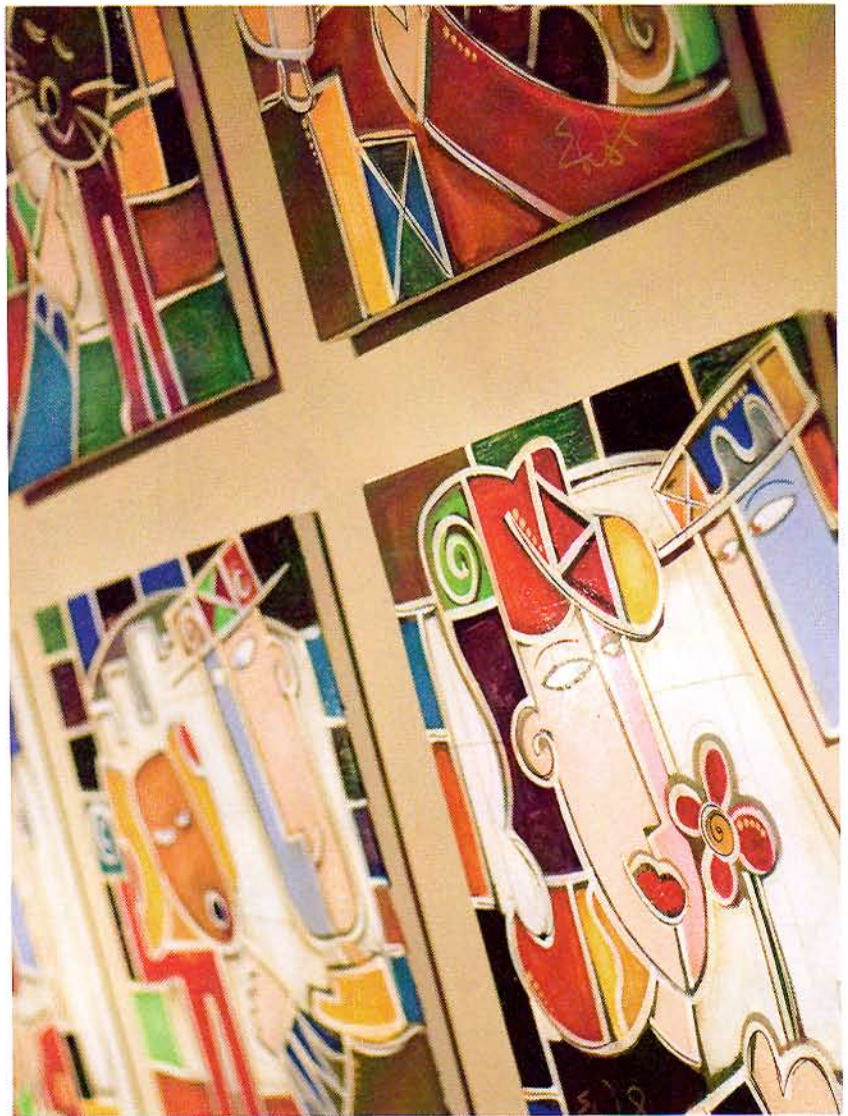
*The feel good art  
of Eric Waugh*

Many civilizations have come and gone, but it is often the art that remains, giving us clues to a bygone life. From cave paintings to frescoes frozen in time in volcanic ash, art itself has been a constant.

So who then is the “twenty-first century painter,” and what will future anthropologists likely think about our culture as we near the end of the first decade of a new century and millennium?

What if you’re an artist with a light spirit who wants to evoke a pleasant emotion, and while you’re at it, even make a living doing it? Meet Montreal artist Eric Waugh. With boyish good looks and an easy charm, Waugh has carved out a lucrative living by creating that good feeling in all his work, using savvy marketing skills to get it noticed. Waugh, 43, recognizes he is not the eccentric we have come to expect in our artists, but makes no apologies. “I am the hardest working artist in the business,” he claims. And few could argue. He produces more than 500 paintings a year, which is quite prolific by any standard.

Within minutes of meeting Waugh you can’t help but notice his great enthusiasm, and you



quickly find out that he has an appreciation for all the arts. The youngest of five children, he remembers always creating, even in his earliest years. While the education system was not very supportive of his talent, his parents were. His practical nature led him into a freelance career of designing packaging for such big names as Coca Cola and MacDonald’s, but when business began to dry up, his brother introduced him to an art dealer in Toronto. Waugh was down to his last dime, so the art dealer fronted him the money to create a few works. Weeks later Waugh received a call from the dealer informing him, “Congratulations,

you’re a professional artist.” All his pieces had sold and so began a 17-year relationship. Now that his work has become popular, Waugh no longer has an agent, and represents himself.

His paintings, most of which are done in acrylic, are easily recognizable with their bright colours, graphic shapes, and a touch of whimsy. Though his subject matter has changed over the years from non-objective abstract to more tangible images with meaning, his use of pattern and colour distribution consistently creates an uplifting feeling. Exciting, textured and sometimes 3-D, his stylized artwork took shape not from formal training,



but instead through experimentation. Using different tools and materials, he discovered what worked best for him.

His paintings don't come from a dark and moody place, and he is certainly not the prototypical suffering artist, but he is very much a philanthropic one. He has earned a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* for creating the largest painting in the world. *Hero* is 41,400 sq. ft. and was made to help raise funds for *Camp Heartland*, a camp for kids affected by HIV/AIDS. He has also done work for the *Starlight Foundation*, *Gilda's Club*, and the *Kelty Patrick Dennehy Foundation*, to name a few. In fact, the New York State Assembly has honoured Waugh for his charity work. This year he joined Ty Pennington on ABC's *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, where he created the mural "Four Seasons of Fun" for *Camp Heartland's* recreation facility.

Waugh has perfected a process that satisfies both his artistic expression and his desire to perform live (a remnant from his garage band days). In his "Live Paintings," which he sometimes performs on cruises or for charity functions, Waugh incorporates another important element into his art – music. These performances have been hugely successful as audiences get to see him at his craft. Starting with a

blank canvas, he paints a nearly completed work while moving to the music. Later he adds the finishing touches before delivering the painting to its new owner. Recently he has even begun creating his own music, to which he paints.

Waugh is better known in the U.S., which is where he sells 80 per cent of his work, and the Atlanta Jazz Fest is his favourite venue. Music is a big part of his life. Besides it being the inspiration behind his "Live Painting", musical instruments also figure prominently in many of his works.

Would he encourage any of his three children to pursue a career in art? "If the passion was there, but I am not sure my wife would agree," he says smiling. He does, however see himself mentoring young artists in the future. His advice for would-be artists? "Paint a lot!" But he quickly adds, "and take a business course."

What future anthropologists might glean from viewing one of Eric Waugh's works is a simple desire to feel good and to spread that feeling as far and wide as possible. Not a bad inspiration for all of us, and a hopeful future reflection of our current place in time. **MW**

*Eric Waugh's work can be viewed at [www.ericwaugh.com](http://www.ericwaugh.com)*

