

Artist drawn to moments in time

Joseph Chin
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Many artists like their subjects on a grand scale. They believe, perhaps erroneously, that it adds a sense of monumentalism to their work.

Not, however, Mark Jeffrey, who embraces small subjects — but makes them large in meaning.

"I'm drawn to moments in time. I hope that my art captures the essence of these moments ... happy, sad, everyday things," said the Oakville artist, whose exhibition, aptly titled "In the Moment," opens today (Saturday, April 30) at Rumi Galleries in Port Credit.

Jeffrey succeeds in his goal admirably. The 40-odd paintings in the show depict ordinary everyday occurrences such as pond hockey, winter walks and raking leaves. Then he goes one step further and complements the art with titles that are just as evocative: Their Stanley Cup, A Crisp Day, The Happiest Leaf Raker I Ever Knew, The Tale of the Apple Thief, Yesterday's Sandcastles, One Day I'll Go Back! ...

"I'm drawn to (these moments) and I worry that they will be lost as we move forward," he said.

Not surprisingly, Jeffrey lists among his influences Tom Thomson, the Canadian artist of the early 20th century, who directly influenced the Canadian painters who would come to be known as the Group of Seven. Jeffrey's work also echoes that of another of his favourites, Vincent van Gogh, the Dutch post-Impressionist painter whose work is known for its vivid colours and emotional impact.

Jeffrey, 49, took to the easel some 18 years ago.

"I always felt the need to do something creative, but never really did much about it," said the self-taught artist. The proverbial lightbulb, he said, went off following a brush with illness.

"At that point I realized I had to make time to paint," he said.

Which he still does, though, he still holds down a full-time job.

Because he's not burdened down with academic constraints, Jeffrey allows his art to take him wherever it will.

"Lots of my paintings are done from my imagination. I just let them happen," he said.

Some of Jeffrey's work are inspired by a sense of loss. And, living in fast-developing Oakville, he witnesses that loss on a daily basis. Out Back, for example, shows three young skinny players on a tiny pond dwarfed by a backdrop of tall buildings.

"There are no more rolling meadows. They're paving over everything," he laments.

Still, when viewing Jeffrey's work, the sense is one of overarching joy. His love of painting shines through, no matter how sombre his subject.

Perhaps, too, it's because he's sort of a poetic soul.

"When I was 7, I thought if I threw a rock hard enough, I could hit the moon. When I was 7, I thought that reindeer could fly. When I was 7, I thought my dog would never die. When I was 7, 8 came too soon," he writes on his website (www.markjeffrey.ca).

Says Charlotte Rumi, who brought Jeffrey to her gallery: "Mark has a unique style that's very Canadian. He deserves to be recognized for his good work."

Rumi Galleries is located at 55 Woodlawn Ave. The exhibition runs to May 14. Go to www.rumigalleries.com to view Jeffrey's work.

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Mark Jeffrey. Artist Mark Jeffrey (far left) opened his show "In the Moments" at the Rumi Gallery in Port Credit with an opening reception Thursday evening. Mark Jeffrey with one of his oils, joined by, from left, Joseph Rumi, Director of Fine Art, Charlotte Rumi, Vice-President, and Richard Rumi, President of Rumi Gallery. *Photo by Rob Beintema*