

Artist brilliantly simplifies the intricate business of life

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BY NANCY SNIPPER

Duane Gordon has a nine-to-five job. He's a technical writer for software, research and development. The kind of pressurized job of: "Yes sir, and I'll have it ready in no time." He wears a suit, perfectly ironed shirt and a tie. About the only thing that isn't conservative in his apparel is the funky chain tie clip. But don't judge a 'suit' by its colour. There's something else about this self-effacing fellow. He's one of those anomalies — a gifted artist who didn't buy into taking art classes to learn how to express his world through painting.

"My dad who was a sought-after engineer travelled so much throughout the world, there was no chance to stay in one place to learn how to draw. But I wanted to be an artist since I was six. I was interested in drawing, not colour. Play for me wasn't football; it was drawing," said Duane, father of two daughters who ironically have no interest in drawing. Duane also pointed out that his father dramatically discouraged his art dream by enrolling the shy boy into military college even though he had been accepted into Banff School of Fine Arts on a scholarship.



Duane Gordon at the Maison de la culture Notre Dame de Grace.

So how did this enigmatic globetrotting son become the impressive painter he is today?

"I'm 44, and I went from drawing to painting seven years ago. It was my wife who urged me to get back into art. I took a drawing course, but this time I felt limited, so I entered the world of colour by taking a beginners class at a community centre."

He hasn't looked back since. Duane's oil paintings are magical. They are surreal and always surprising. Precise images are juxtaposed aside absurd even primitively rendered elements. His is a perfectly neat and stunningly immaculate world of silky textures and clean-cut lines reminiscent of Lawren Harris's vision. Gaze at one of his hypnotic yet simple scenes; they are delicate and sparse in effect.

"I simplify and simplify and simplify. I depict the minimum in order to create an uncluttered scene which invites the viewer to explore." Each place has its own emotional resonance.

Duane is calling out to you but in silence, and the result is a calmness, an eternity that envelopes you.

"I'm not one of these people who don't know what the painting will be in the end. I can see everything in my mind's eye

before I put brush to canvass.” So for Duane, the preparatory time is actually longer than the painting time.

“It can take me as long as a month to think through the images before I paint them.”

In one captivating painting called Winter Pine — a scene inspired from childhood, Duane paints a surreal, cartoon-like snowy field bordered by cone-shaped trees. He recalls this particular scene as making him feel lonely. Look at the blue shadows and muted orange orb in the background — the sun, and indeed, there is a feeling of loneliness and solitude in this quiet unpeopled scene.

In the real world of computers and business, Duane is calm, collected, quiet and introverted; but through his art, emotions are expressed, not violent, chaotic ones. His paintings prove gentleness can be depicted with strength. There is a bit of Botero in his style.

“I want to reveal the beauty of the world that surrounds us. I add drama to the mundane, emphasizing the unobtrusive beauty, strength, joy, power or humour surrounding us. My paintings become more than a thing to see. We share the same image. Will we share the same emotion? It’s doubtful and irrelevant. But often, I am told that what I felt in creating the painting is conveyed.

“I sometimes find my subjects through my travelling, but I don’t have to go far. A walk around the tree-lined areas of NDG, including Monkland Avenue past the apartments, shops along with the commotion of everyday life — even a rest in my garden — will yield a myriad of opportunities for a quick sketch or a photo to be used for a painting. I allow myself to focus on the essence of what I see and the emotion it inspires.”

Married in the First Baptist Church on Côte St Luc Road, and now with one of his daughter’s having graduated from Villa Maria, Duane noted that NDG figures prominently in his life. He loves the lanes and overhanging greenery. “They inspire me; they may not end up in a painting, but they energize me.

Stare into the huge turquoise inside curl of his wave painting, and you never want it to reach the shore. His art is striking, beckoning, bold, yet calm. Duane illustrates that colour, simplicity and majesty are one and the same. Own one of his pieces, and a hush descends in your soul. He is the Zen of painters.

- Duane Gordon’s paintings are on display at Cactus Gallery with 9 artistes 9 at 5276 NDG Ave., corner of Decarie. He invites you there.