

SUN

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Painterman likes young critics

By Linda Robertson
for The Regina Sun

The recess bell rings at Sacred Heart School and a gaggle of students floods Regina artist Wilf Perreault's studio in the school's basement. But Perreault — a.k.a. painterman — doesn't mind a bit. In fact, he rather likes it.

"They're good critics," he says. They're never afraid to say whether they like something — or don't, he adds — and they call him "painterman", a title he likes.

A youngster viewing one of Perreault's big canvases of a park scene immediately identifies it as the park near Wascana Pool. "That's right," Perreault says.

Another confidently speaks his opinion: "It looks good to me."

"I'm not happy with it," replies Perreault.

"What's wrong with it? What else have you got to do?" the future critic questions.

"It needs stronger colors in the foreground," Perreault explains.

To the casual observer, it seems nothing more than maybe an insignificant conversation, but the students freely give opinions, and Perreault not only listens seriously, but also explains carefully and simply. There's a small lesson here; infinitesimal in life's grand scheme of things, but a lesson nevertheless: the children are

able to observe and interact with a working artist, to discover that artists "look like regular people", and that's something Perreault believes is valuable experience.

"I had the fortunate experience of being around artists when I was quite young," he says.

"Since I'm here as an artist, I'm more of a role model that they can look at — a real live artist who is doing it as a living."

Perreault is currently on a leave of absence from the Regina Separate School Board after winning a Saskatchewan Arts Board senior arts award two years ago. He then approached the school board to see if it would be interested in letting him work in an unused classroom.

The board agreed; Sacred Heart agreed; and Perreault got his studio and now acts as the school's unofficial artist-in-residence.

What's more, he's enjoying that arrangement.

He says that if he's asked why he paints, the "the bottom line is I'm enjoying it." Furthermore, he shares that feeling with his young critics.

Perreault is probably best known for his large paintings of backlane Regina, a subject he first began looking at in the early '70s, although he does paint many other things, including portraits.

"I was looking for an interesting subject that no



Name: Wilf Perreault
Age: 42
Job: Artist and teacher
Bio: Born in Albertville and raised in Saskatoon, Perreault received an honors degree in fine arts from the University of Saskatchewan and studied education. Moved to Regina in 1971 and taught at O'Neill High School. Has also taught at community colleges throughout the province, at University of Regina Extension Department and has adjudicated provincial competitions. His works hang in Canadian and U.S. collections and he has had several one-man and group shows throughout Western Canada. Won a silver medal at the international Jeux de la Francophonie in Morocco last summer in which more than 40 countries participated. Currently on leave from his teaching job.

one else would be interested in," he says.

Famous last words. Perreault recently returned from Morocco where he was one of five Canadians (each in a different discipline) selected to represent Canada at the Jeux de la Francophonie, a joint cultural and athletic event.

He also came back with a silver medal for one of his backlane scapes — the one that now hangs in the Wascana Rehabilitation

Centre.

"It's interesting to be part of an international event," he modestly concedes, going on to describe the enjoyment he got from painting in historical gardens located in Rabat, the city where the cultural events were held.

The prestigious win was a great honor but, just as vividly, Perreault remembers the very first time he won a prize for his art: eighty-three cents when his submission won at the Regina summer exhibition. The two events may be worlds apart, but the pleasure is as significant.

Born 42 years ago in Albertville, a town north of Prince Albert, and raised in Saskatoon, Perreault, who described himself as a shy child, loved to draw and often drew pictures as a way of communicating.

"I did a lot of drawing, but I always thought the other kids were better than I was."

Some of the boys could do wonderful drawings of trucks," he says wryly.

Recognizing his desire, his parents arranged for him to take lessons during the winter from an neighbor who was also an artist. Even at a young age, the students would be encouraged to go out and paint on the spot.

"It was just a good experience," Perreault said.

At the University of Saskatchewan, Perreault studied fine arts during a period when abstract training was the vogue. Not encouraged to paint the representational images he was used to, Perreault graduated fully intending to become an abstract sculptor.

He followed his fine arts honors degree with a year of education and graduated in 1971. That year, he and his wife, Sandi, moved to Regina

and Perreault began art at O'Neill High

The move also rekindled his interest in representational painting; he found himself drawn to where he was brought an introduction to abstract principles. By then the training had given him work depth and confidence.

"With abstract painting you constantly think about orchestrating and manipulating your mind. Those technical lessons, a valuable lesson, a continually resorts to his abstract training to develop his current work."

As a result of an accident a few years ago, Perreault paces his painting. While undergoing intense physiotherapy, he found his art and development a positive side-effect. "I became more and more confident and made better work of it."

Despite having his work hang in collections in Canada and in the United States, Perreault has been part of one-man and group shows throughout Western Canada, including his latest with the Susan Whitney that goes until November. He still expresses surprise and pleasure — at such a time when his daughter asked for one of his paintings as a birthday gift. To balance life's pleasures, however, Perreault says that his other passion is his work as an artist.

The label "artist" is a tough one for Perreault to come to terms with. He prefers to think of himself as "a student of art."

"As a student you learn — and I have learned," he said.



Regina Sun photo by Robert Watson

The bottom line for Wilf Perreault is he likes his work

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