

Coast to Canvas

CALEDON EAST ARTIST CORY TRÉPANIÉR HAS MADE A MISSION OF PAINTING THE HERITAGE COAST

BY JAMES SMEDLEY

Silhouetted against the setting sun, atop a knob of granite, Cory Trépanier looks more like a part of the landscape than an artist there to paint it. He sits cross-legged in front of an easel, surrounded by the abrupt oscillations that define the rugged landscape of the Lake Superior coastline. The long sand beaches, looming headlands and age-worn fingers of rock sinking into icy-clear waters are finding a place as the subject of Cory's Coast to Canvas Project. By the time the project is completed, the Caledon East artist will have created close to 60 original oil paintings of the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, stretching from Lake Huron's Georgian Bay to the international border at Port Severn on Lake Superior.

Cory's solitude is short-lived. Emerging from the windswept pine and cedar onto a water-washed foundation of quartz-veined granite are Cory's wife, Janet, and their two girls, Andie, 7, and Sydney, 3. The children scramble up the rock to peer over their father's shoulder as he paints against the fading light. Cory captures the perspective of the scene, fills in much of the colour, and snaps digital images before darkness falls. By the time paints, easel and canvas are packed, the moon is poking over the tree tops, illuminating

the warm August night to guide the family back to their beachfront campsite.

This is the home stretch of the year-long Coast to Canvas Project during which Cory and his family have spent about one month of each season along the wild stretches of the 4,200-kilometre coastline. Their inaugural paddling

"SPRING HUES" (ABOVE) 18" X 12" OIL ON LINEN

"After paddling for a couple of hours on Georgian Bay, east of Killarney Provincial Park, we set up camp near the unique and beautiful Fox Islands. The late afternoon light brought a bouquet of hues to the rocks, mosses and new leaves of spring."

voyage back in autumn of 2001 covered several points from Superior's Neys Provincial Park to Twelve-Mile Bay in Georgian Bay. Subsequent excursions in

winter, spring, and now summer took them along remote stretches of Lakes Superior and Huron. For the most part they camped in the wilderness, but their accommodations also included roadside hotels, rustic lodges, and an abandoned cabin. Travelling by helicopter, fishing vessel, canoe, snowshoe and on foot allowed them to experience remote sections of the coast in seasonal guises that relatively few have witnessed.

Cory has lived in the Caledon area since his teens and much of his art has been inspired by the local countryside. He recently completed a poster commissioned to promote the Humber River, and he has just been commissioned to create another poster, promoting the natural significance of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Although he has also travelled and painted extensively across Canada, his first introduction to the rugged northern coasts of Superior and Huron came only a few years ago when the Ontario government hired him to produce a painting depicting the beauty and diversity of the newly christened Great Lakes Heritage Coast.

'OLD WOMAN BAY' 16" X 8.5" OIL ON PANEL

"Climbing on snowshoes, I was looking for my own perspective on the sheer rocks of Old Woman Bay, an attraction for travellers along Highway 17 on Lake Superior. After some considerable effort, a few ice slicks, and a pack full of painting gear, I found myself spoiled with this incredible view, one shared only by the ravens. After working till dusk, a moonlit hike back down the trail topped off a great evening of painting."



PHOTOS BY SIMON E. BOIS



THE TRÉPANIÉR FAMILY: CORY, JANET, ANDIE AND SYDNEY

Cory spent two weeks travelling the region to gather reference for the 'Living Coast' commission. Although he injected as many of the coast's attributes as he could into the painting, he was struck by the great diversity of subject matter offered by the rugged beauty of the coastal landscape. "The introduction to this magnificent stretch of coastline really helped to chart my artistic and professional course for the next few years," he says.

Although he had an established career as a commercial artist, Cory was increasingly looking for opportunities

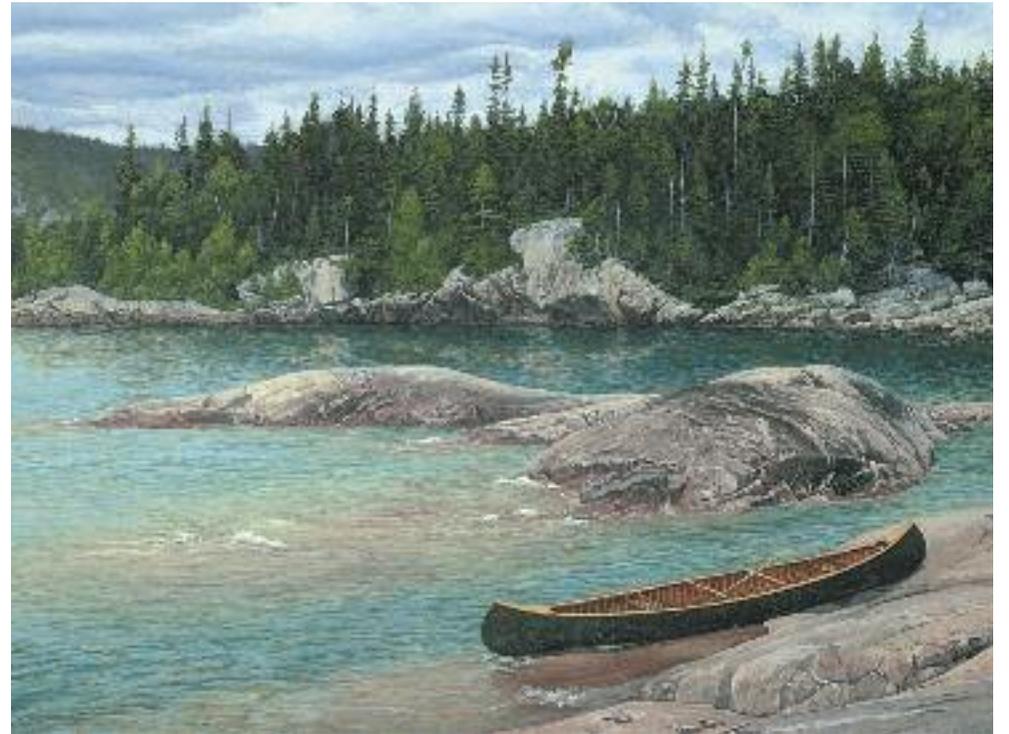
to focus his efforts on fine art. The publicity around the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, designated as a 'featured area' through Ontario's Living Legacy program, meshed well with his desire to paint it. With his artistic abilities rivalled only by his business savvy, the Coast to Canvas Project was born when Cory was able to partially finance his plans through private investors familiar with his art. "Some want more of my work, some think it's a good investment, some want to be part of the project," he says.

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'SIGNAL FIRE' 16" X 11" OIL ON PANEL

"Absorbed in painting a sunset, I hadn't seen the fog creep in. The gap back from the island was not large, but waves were washing up heavily. Our campsite was hidden behind a point, but as I paddled into the open, I spotted a small orange light. Janet and the girls had made a small fire out on the rocks to help guide me back. I gave a couple of quick flashlight bursts in their direction. They immediately flashed back. By the time we were ready to bed down that night, the moon's light danced on the water through the fog. I grabbed my painting gear again, and by the light of my headlamp, developed a painting that will certainly bring back memories for years to come."





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The decision to include his family in the project was not a difficult one. "One of the most frustrating things is coming back from a trip and saying 'oh you should have seen this, you should have seen that.' Now I don't need to do that." He admits that it might have been easier to get more work done if he had been in the field by himself, but it was not an attractive option. "I am not the solitary artist. I like to be around people."

Janet admits that during the initial leg of Coast to Canvas their youngest daughter, Sydney, would occasionally ask when they could go home, but Janet is sure the project will have a lasting and positive effect on the girls. "They love it and I think it's a fabulous experience. I want them to appreciate this, and not to think the mall is a cool place to hang around. I think that's happening for sure," she says.

Cory agrees, citing an incident following their autumn trip. "It wasn't a week after we got back and Andie begged me to sleep out in the tent with her. It really made me realize that, as young as they are, these trips are having an impact on them."

Travelling and working as a family meant Janet played a huge role in the project. "I could not consider bringing the girls on a trip by myself if I was going to be doing a lot of work," says Cory. Janet's duties included home-schooling Andie, keeping the family fed and clothed in the field, as well as shooting video and taking photographs.

Back at their home and studio on The Gore Road, Janet manages the affairs of their business, Trépanier Originals Inc. It's a role she accepts with enthusiasm. "I might be a bit biased but I think his art is fabulous and he is definitely going to go places," she says.

Cory's highly accessible wilderness landscapes hover closer to realism than impressionism. "If you look closely at any of the paintings, they are not as tight as they might seem from a distance. My goal in a painting is to create an atmosphere and mood that represents the place I was at. Some pieces I leave a little looser if they

accomplish the goal I want," he says.

Cory, 34, has that rare mix of artistic talent combined with the passion to pursue it. He says it leaves him little choice but to turn his talents into a career. "I know that if I didn't, I'd grow to be a very miserable old man."

Cory's ability to sustain his creativity under a wide range of conditions has been key to capturing the coast through four seasons. I first witnessed the zeal with which he pursues his work during the late winter of 2002, when I joined him for a snowshoe trek to a looming bluff overlooking Lake Superior's Old Woman Bay. He laid oil to canvas in twenty-below temperatures for several hours before ambling stiffly over to the fire with a partially completed canvas under his arm. Other seasonal challenges included spring bugs, summer sun, rough water, and the constantly changing light and weather conditions along the coast.

In recent months, Cory is seeing much more canvas than coast. In spite of the challenge of painting outdoors, he surpassed his original goal of forty to fifty pieces and he has been hunkered down in the studio putting the final touches on the remaining few of what will total close to 60 canvases.

Cory will exhibit his Coast to Canvas paintings at an inaugural show to be

'REPOSE' 30" X 18" OIL ON LINEN

"James was roaming the waters with his lovingly rebuilt canvas-covered canoe. I had eyed this work of art since he first put it in the water. Hearing the deep yet gentle, hollow thump caused me to look up. Looking at my composition, and then looking back again at the freshly altered scene, I just couldn't resist the focal point that the canoe brought to it. It was by canoe that I learned to truly appreciate these waters in the first place, so it seemed proper to have it be part of the landscape."

held September 12-14 in the Caledon Log Home, located at the southeast corner of Airport Road and Old Church Road. A full-scale exhibition, including larger canvases and a video record of his travels, is scheduled for the summer of 2004 at Dufferin County Museum and Archives. Cory also plans to show the collection in communities along the Great Lakes

Heritage Coast, including such venues as Old Fort William in Thunder Bay and the Art Gallery of Algoma in Sault Ste. Marie. ~

For more information about the project, visit www.trepanieroriginals.com.

James Smedley is an outdoor writer based in Wawa.

'SUMMER GREENS' 48" X 24" OIL ON LINEN

"This incredible old apple tree was bursting with life during Caledon's remarkably lush summer of 2002. In the background, a small footbridge leads to a pond, barely visible for the height of the hay, its position given away by the rising mist. The pruning marks on the tree, the bridge, the near and distant fields, all remind me just how much we influence our land – and that, when those interactions are done in a way that allows for regeneration and natural spaces, the outcome can be beautiful."

