



# inspiring young artists

LANDSCAPE ARTIST GORDON HARRISON HELPS 41 GRADE 8 STUDENTS DISCOVER THEIR INNER PAINTER

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Last fall, 41 Ottawa students had a stroke of good luck – a brush stroke, to be precise.

They had a chance to meet Gordon Harrison, one of the city's most popular landscape painters, and he showed them how to make their own art.

This weekend, they'll also learn how it feels to part with their art because the Gordon Harrison Gallery is holding a silent auction of their works.

By Sunday at 5 p.m., the works should all be sold.

But the finished works only represent part of their learning; the rest will stay with them long after the paintings are gone. Thirteen-year-old Luka Stojanovic, for example, is now quoting such statements as "painting is silent poetry; poetry is painting with the gift of speech."

The idea – now known as the Gordon Harrison Art Inspiration Project – is the brainchild of Harrison and his life partner and gallery director Phil Émond.

"The community has been very good to Gordon Harrison Gallery the last number of years and Phil and I decided to do something to give back to the community," Harrison says.

"I've always enjoyed working with children and we wanted to do something that meant something to us, so we decided to develop a mentoring program."

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From left to right: Phil Émond, Gallerist; Sally Swan, Teacher, Turnbull School; Luka Stojanovic, Student; Markie Diotte, Student; Alison Wyatt, Student; Gordon Harrison and Mary Ann Turnbull, School Director.

Their plan was coming together one Friday evening last fall when Turnbull School art teacher Sally Swan dropped into the gallery. Swan grabbed the idea, which was to expose students to oil painting of Canadian landscapes, and refused to let go.

A partnership soon developed. Then, Harrison and Émond had to figure out how to teach all 41 Grade 8 students at the private school on Fisher Avenue who volunteered to take part how to paint with oils in his small studio.

Harrison first did a few in-class sessions with the group. He talked about his life and career as a painter, and about art and inspiration. Then he asked them to find a landscape subject to paint and he helped them do a pencil sketch first and then an India ink sketch of their subject, just as he does when he's starting a painting.

Next, the school bused the students to the gallery where they had two sessions about the business of art. They talked about Harrison's paintings, as well as how to run a gallery.

Then came the fun: In four groups of 10, they went to his studio and Harrison walked them through completing their paintings with his own easels and oil paints, a session that last about two-and-a-half hours.

"Most of the students hadn't worked in oils before," says Harrison, who paints only in oils.

"Oils aren't typically used in schools because of the toxicity issues," Swan notes. But her students loved it.

"When you put it on the canvas, the oil isn't just there forever. You can move it around. It's a paint you can go back to," says Luka.

"You can pile it on and it gives the painting a lot of life," says Markie Diotte, 13.

Harrison was amazed at how the students responded to the program, and the medium.

"I was very impressed with the quality of the work. I think every piece is a success."

"This made such a difference," says Alison Wyatt, 14, who recently applied to Canterbury High School. "When's the next time I'm going to have a professional artist looking over my shoulder and saying, 'Yeah, that's great, but why don't you do something about this?' I'm only 14 years old and getting to meet and work with a professional is something that not many people twice my age can say. Going to an artist's studio is – you know – a big deal."

"See? How could you not do this project again?" enthuses Émond.

And indeed they will. Although Harrison and Émond would be happy to work with Turnbull School again, they've been approached by other interested schools for next year's project.

The idea was to turn the proceeds of Sunday's auction over to Turnbull School for art programming, but because Turnbull doesn't fundraise for its educational programs, the school will donate the funds to The Ottawa Hospital Foundation.

Colours of Canada: Coast to Coast

What: An exhibition and silent auction sale of Canadian landscape paintings by Turnbull School

Grade 8 students