



□ Conrad Furey in his studio with figures under construction

Mark Fraser, The Spectator

From the studio to the street

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Special to The Spectator

THE PAINTING on the Mary Street wall in Hamilton shows a man, face forward with eyes looking skywards, his hands stretched up towards a fluttering bird. It's a piece by artist Conrad Furey, celebrating the year of peace in 1986.

Scrawled on top of the figure is a crude depiction of male genitalia, an unplanned addition that appeared on the painting last week.

But the graffiti doesn't bother the artist.

"It's to be expected in a sense. I'd rather that it wouldn't happen, but I don't put them (the paintings) behind glass."

Being an artist in Hamilton could make someone feel as useful as an umbrella in a blizzard. Furey admits he sells far more paintings in Ottawa than in Hamilton because people in his own city aren't as interested in art. But Furey, 33, thinks that could change, so he's bringing his art to the

Artist Conrad Furey brings folksy images to the neighborhood

ings on store walls and playground buildings around Hamilton.

He says in Hamilton most people are working just to pay their bills and don't have a lot of time to appreciate or even think about art. So he wants to capture their imaginations and perhaps spark their interest in art with his round, simple figures painted in familiar neighborhood spots.

But if Furey is moving his art out of the gallery and into the neighborhoods, the city also invades Furey's own private studio.

Furey does his paintings and sculptures in a two-level studio on top of Perell Travel on Main Street East near John Street.

The studio walls are covered with

show to be held Saturday. Large windows look out on to Main Street admitting sunlight and the smell of fries and chicken, wafting in from the Kentucky Fried Chicken shop below.

But while the air says 'grease,' the paintings say 'salt,' with their images of men and women living by the sea. A man in a boat is a trademark image for Furey, who grew up in Baie Verte, a small town in Newfoundland. "The strongest images — for me that's been the man in the boat — are images that are ingrained from youth so those images are in me and I can't change that. I think eventually that might change but for me it's hard to find strong images walking down the street. I guess the thing with the man in the boat is as old as civilized man. It is sort of a symbol."

As Furey speaks, you can hear the last traces of a Newfoundland accent. He likes to incorporate his past and a sense of fun into his paintings.

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