

Friday JANUARY 2 2009

south
delta *leader*



**RENAISSANCE
MAN**

From the human form to machines,
Tsawwassen artist applies his vision to it all



INSPIRATIONAL—Garrett Campbell-Wilson's early love for comic books and drawing has led to a passion for painting. The piece behind him is titled *Paradise Woman*. Visit www.gcamwilstudio.com for more paintings.

Tyler Garnham photo

KRISTINE THIESSEN
REPORTER

When Garrett Campbell-Wilson paints, he has all the colours he could possibly want in front of him. He has a theme in mind—it might be a landscape, an emotion, a movement like dance—but he does not decide in advance exactly what he'll create, or what colours he'll use.

It's a liquid process, he says. What results are pieces like *Embrace the Dance*, two figures in feverish movement, complemented by bold strokes in warm browns, yellows, oranges and hints of green.

The four by three foot canvas hangs above the living room couch in the Tsawwassen apartment he lives in with his mom, Vena.

Throughout the suite are the 23-year-old's paintings, and they complement the warmth of the home where Vena makes mango tea with a hint of ginger and is proud to talk of her son's accomplishments. And those are many, particularly for someone so young.

Garrett has been drawing since he could grasp a crayon. "Crayola and Play-Doh, that was the beginning. And for a long time it was mainly drawing and drafting that I was

Renaissance man

**From the human form to machines,
Tsawwassen artist applies his vision to it all**

into," he says. "Drawing with pencil, charcoal, anything that was messy. And usually it was on a big scale because I like to get very physical with my artwork."

Vena laughs when she recalls a knee-high tall Garrett painting the carpet. And he was a voracious reader and collector of comic books. Batman, Spiderman, X-Men—at eight years old, he wanted to be a comic book artist, and this goal fostered a fascination with the human figure.

"The top of the line guys know anatomy like the back of their hand, so since I was eight I was practicing in that

way," he explains.

Garrett started with the outside of the body, moved to the inside, broke down the skeleton and dove into the muscles.

"I have that down pat now, and now I'm moving into the internal organs and the nervous system and the brain. My mission is to know the human body inside out."

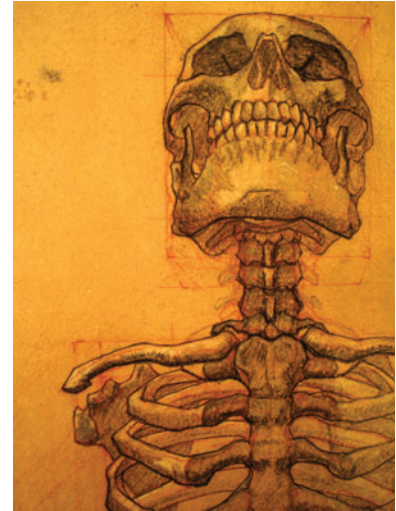
Human anatomy applies to other aspects of the artist's life. He's achieved a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and currently practices three types of Kung Fu.

Films also influenced his drawing styles. He watched Japanese animation (manga) like *Ninja Scroll*, *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. Films and comics have helped him develop the ability to see where the figures in his paintings are coming from, and where they are going.

His early fixation with comics and animation has revealed a wider world to the artist. When Garrett was a teen he was one of a handful of high school students within the Lower Mainland accepted into the Emily Carr University of Art's Gifted Teen Scholarship Program.

"It was a huge motivator, is what it was," he recalls.

Through the program his work was displayed with his peers at the prestigious Buschlen Mowatt Gallery, and it



ARTISTIC ENDEAVOURS— Mom and manager Vena sits with her son; Garrett is determined to know the human body inside out. He has the skeleton down pat as in this piece titled *Human Structure*; The animal kingdom is another topic he likes to tackle. Tyler Garnham photos



was at an Emily Carr portfolio day he first met someone from the Boston Art Institute who encouraged him to apply to their post-secondary school.

It was at Boston where a professor encouraged him to make the transition from drawing to painting.

“You know what it was, I had trouble translating my drawing style into my painting style. It wasn’t until I became comfortable painting the way that I draw, then painting made sense to me.”

He gestures at a painting on an easel in his living room of a cat titled *Curious*.

“I had a professor in university and he was always encouraging me to paint. We had this one session where we all had blank boards and I took out my paints. I don’t know what he did, he said something in just the right way—treat it like a drawing.

“So that’s what I did, and when I stood back from this after I finished it I said wow, this is probably the beginning of my painting career.”

And that painting career has blossomed well since graduating a year and a half ago. After graduation he was asked to teach figure drawing and anatomy at the university during the summer. Vena left her job to manage Garrett’s career full time—he also says his dad, Keith, is a big support—and they’ve come up with ideas to make his art more accessible, from producing art cards to one-of-a-kind t-shirts with

original artwork. They’re also making use of the Internet to gain additional exposure and launched a web site a few weeks ago (www.gcamwilstudio.com).

Right now an original painting can fetch about \$3,500 to \$9,000, and once they are purchased he says it’s hard to let go.

While he pinpointed *Curious* as one of his milestone pieces, each painting holds special experiences for him.

“They actually all have their own importance, because I approach every piece differently. They’re all milestone pieces, each one of my paintings are like my children. I don’t really have a favorite because I’ve had a different experience with all of them.

“Many of them were born at the same time because I work on multiple pieces at the same time, so some will have the same style because they were in creation at the same time.”

Two pieces he’s currently working on are for Black History Month in February. Canada Post is releasing stamps to honour African-Canadians Rosemary Brown, the first black woman to hold public office in Canada, and Abraham Shadd, who was involved in the Underground Railroad and was the first black person elected to public office in the country. Garrett has been commissioned to create two paintings for the launch of the stamps.

Up next, he will install a few pieces at the Canvas

Lounge in Vancouver.

Garrett has also dabbled in product design, creating jewelry for A Passion for Diamonds called the Iced Out Collection in 2003, including a lion whose mane is encrusted with diamonds.

“It was a cool experience, dealing with product design. I have a lot of designs for ideas for products. I’ve designed mechanical hands. In learning about the human body I’ve been thinking about ways to make the human body stronger through machines. It’s kind of sci fi-ish.”

He refuses to pigeonhole himself into one subject matter and style.

“A lot of people have said, you have to have one subject matter if you want people to recognize your work, or one style, and I said no, I was against that . . . I love the human figure, I love the animal kingdom, I love the abstract, I love machines.”

And he enjoys contributing his skills to fundraisers. Last month he worked in collaboration with CUSO, an organization with a focus on reducing poverty abroad, at an event in Vancouver, and he has been involved with fundraisers such as Wine on the Mountain, which raised money for adoptive families in B.C.

“It’s all really in the name of creating a positive change in the world and attracting people to a cause,” he says.

■ kthiessen@southdeltaleader.com