

Close Your Eyes ... a Life-Defining Moment Awaits

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BY MARY SAVAGE

Réal Fournier knows a thing or two about life-defining moments. He's never been afraid to act on these moments even though it meant risking everything – at times – to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. His style exudes a magical air that draws you in and holds you captive, and decades later, his paintings have touched the lives of countless human beings, both young and old, and are sought the world over.

Amidst his quiet demeanour and French accent, Réal Fournier recalls his life: a world that is seemingly distant yet somehow familiar. Ironically, English was his first language, but by the age of seven he was living in an orphanage in Nicolet, Quebec. He struggled to learn French and through his frustration, he turned to drawing as an outlet. “The child within me was much stronger than the image I projected; I was very shy and drawing represented both expression and a way of building my dreams,” he explains. “For a year and a half, I was raised by nuns and they encouraged my creativity because they saw how I struggled; they accepted communication took many forms.”

By the age of 12, Fournier was painting with oil and was influenced by the likes of Goya, van Gogh and Cézanne. The balance of his youth was spent in foster homes until he joined the military and by his early 20s, he had saved enough money to attend college. He earned a physical education degree and by his late 20s, he was teaching primary school. And the day he accepted the teaching job, he knew instinctively, it would last 10 years. During his ninth year of teaching, he had a dream while sleeping one night, and the following day he submitted a letter of resignation. His dream portrayed the life of painter and it foreshadowed Fournier's true calling.

The first big collection that Fournier produced illustrated a series of medicine animals that were based on native teachings found within the mountains of New Mexico. His journey began in Calgary and ended in Santa Fe. Fournier and his wife, Linda, cycled to Santa Fe to study the medicine animals and while en route, he had another dream. This time, the dream revealed how Fournier would portray the animals: while he sat in front of a blank canvas, Fournier would close his eyes and start to move his brush or pencil – in random motion – throughout the canvas. Intuitively, he knew when to stop, open his eyes and study the lines. He called it: ‘eyes-closed-sketch.’ He explains, “I was able to read the unconscious line and find the images that created the painting.”



Artist Real Fournier continues to produce the eyes-closed-sketches, and has also achieved the incredibly accurate process of 3-D painting.

Through the random lines, the animals emerged along with people and nature completing both the foreground and background. He painted with oils in rich, vibrant hues and created 44 works of the medicine animals. They had four gallery showings and not one sold. The night before the fifth and final showing, Fournier and his wife made a promise: if nothing sold during the fifth show, they would keep the entire collection and store it for future use. And nothing sold at the fifth show. Although they had used their life savings to produce the collection, Fournier was not giving up so easily.

“A few days later, we received a call about the medicine animal paintings – it was an offer to purchase the entire collection, but when we learned the collection would be split up and sold at galleries throughout the province, we declined ... even though we desperately needed the money,” Fournier recalls.

He continued to pursue the eyes-closed-sketch, but this time he turned to landscapes. And the first one sold immediately. The landscapes captured a magical setting where trees danced among rolling hills while children and animals



La Famille / The Family", by Réal Fournier, Oil, 60" x 48".

"The large face in the centre represents the little girl who is ill and ready to pass on, but she also represents any child who is terminally ill. As she passes into a new world, she brings her family with her: on the right is her mother and on the left is her father. The face between her parents represents her childhood and she's happy because she's being released from the sickness," explains Fournier. "The birds around her eyes represent an ability to search for her new direction freely – she is free from the illness. The small angel on her forehead represents her inner voice that's guiding her in a new direction – surrounded by light,

and the birds in her hair symbolize her spirit is completely free now."

L'Aide Mondiale aux Enfants (L'AME) is the organization Beaubien is involved with and the children's home is scheduled to open during the summer of 2012.

To learn more and view Réal Fournier's work, visit Webster Galleries:

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www.webstergalleries.com
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"I Am the Ascension and Life", by Réal Fournier, oil on linen, 48" x 96".

From his Calgary studio, Fournier has been commissioned to create dozens of eyes-closed-sketch paintings for people across the country – from individuals and collectors to corporations.

seemed to frolic about – a style that soon became Fournier's signature and spoke to people of all ages. The landscapes seemed to arouse something magical from their youth.

The inspiration for each eyes-closed-sketch painting is partly from Fournier's childhood memories – recalling the countryside in Quebec – and it is partly pure imagination. Each painting is layered with intricate stories and silhouettes; each image giving rise to another. It seems the closer you look, the greater the story found within each work – much like that of a child's imagination.

Fournier continued to produce the eyes-closed-sketch landscapes, but he was also busy working on another idea: 3-D paintings. For 25 years, he studied 3-D comics, shapes, movies – you name it. He was determined to bring another dimension to the eyes-closed-sketch method. And after 12 years of quietly honing his craft, but still not feeling satisfied, he called upon his subconscious to show him the way.

By fine-tuning the colours, he finally achieved an incredibly accurate 3-D painting. The composition came to life – every colour and line blended in perfect harmony. Nothing was misplaced or backwards, and nothing disappeared into the background – the three dimensions flowed together seamlessly.

Among his 3-D work, some of the paintings still originate from pure imagination while others are taken from sketches he drew as a teenager. Like the medicine animals, Fournier knew that one day his earlier sketches would come to life in a greater form – it was only a matter of time.

From his Calgary studio, Fournier has been commissioned to create dozens of eyes-closed-sketch paintings for people across the country – from individuals and collectors to corporations. Some of these works begin with the customer creating the lines and then handing it over to Fournier where he brings it to life, while other pieces are left purely to Fournier's imagination.

Every year, he donates about a dozen pieces to various charities that are specifically created to enrich the lives of children. "When I was young, people helped me and now it's my turn to give back – it's part of the journey in life," he says. "Growing up, the nuns gave me confidence through my drawing and even though my childhood was less than ideal, I wouldn't change a thing. Without a certain degree of suffering, you can't be a good painter – it helps you understand life better and for me, every step of my life has been magical because I have learned from every situation."

Now in his late 50s and through all the years of pursuing his dream, Fournier has never forgotten his childhood years, nor the man and gallery, Yvon Desgagnés, who helped to launch his career 20 years ago. And every year, Fournier travels east for an annual visit and gallery showing.

Last year, while visiting Yvon Desgagnés, a man stopped into the gallery and started to visit with Fournier. The man, Denis Beaubien, was intrigued by Fournier's 3-D paintings and before long, asked Fournier to create a 3-D painting, on commission, for a special project Beaubien had underway.

Baubien had purchased an old, long-since abandoned convent in the town of Nicolet, and his restoration project would soon provide a new home for children who were terminally ill. And as fate would have it, the convent was located on the same parcel of land that housed the orphanage where Fournier had lived along with the nuns who had raised him.

Of course, Fournier agreed with one exception: he would not accept a dime for the painting. He was honoured to create a piece that was specifically designed for the children. After all, this was the place where Fournier discovered his artistic gift and had it not been for the nuns' encouragement, his life could have been very different – and the world a bit less imaginative. **BIC**