

Artist, filmmaker brings the Arctic back to Caledon



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Artist extraordinaire, Caledon Walk Of Fame inductee, Cory Trépanier, is getting very warm reviews to his 50 - plus painting collection of Glaciers and the stupendous scenery in the Canadian far north - the Arctic.

Over a span of ten years, Mr. Trépanier has made four remarkable tours of the Canadian East and West Arctic. During his travels, as filmmaker, he documented his trips, he marches up hills to sit and sketch, and make study paintings of the vistas that swept before him. These sketches and study paintings would become the paintings that are now a travelling museum of paintings, visiting cities across the United States and going to Monaco next year.

We had the chance to speak to Mr Trépanier, calling from Montana, where his Into The Arctic exhibition is on show at the Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman, Montana.

“They painted all the walls especially for this exhibition,” he told us.

In fact, the subtle dark grey the museum chose for the background to the paintings is perfect, for they are portrayals of shining white icebergs, towering and sculpted; barren but wonderful mountain peaks, their intense browns, laced in places with reds and brown's many tones; broad landscapes, streaked with water, land and ice, each taking their turn in the artist's attention. None of the paintings hold the anticipated aspects of landscapes; they all feature the majestic ruggedness of the northern most edges of this country. Only the north looks like this; only here does the night sky light up with the northern Aurora. Mr. Trépanier's paintings are exactly what he saw, what the artist saw: “bridging science with art” was a comment on his website.

“Some of the paintings are lent by my patrons,” said Mr Trépanier. “The central painting is 15 feet long, called the Great Glacier. The tour director in the museum is a real pro. The crate for the painting, with the painting, weigh about 1,000 pounds. They lift it with wires. When we were first touring, we didn't have all this.”

He went to talk about recent events: “I went to the Arctic this summer. I did four expeditions - the original tour plan was two. My 19 year old daughter, Sydney went with me this time - that was nice. She's a model. She carried her own 75 pound back pack. We were on Baffin Island, at an incredibly beautiful glacier. She brought a roll of red material and we did a shot of her modelling this in her bare feet! It was a hard earned photo.”

He told us, “Prince Albert II [of Monaco] has an interest in this. We showed the last of the films in Monaco.

“We had met the Ambassador at an exhibition of James Cameron's in Toronto. I gave her a Giclee of one of my Arctic paintings and spent some time talking to her. Then, we were invited to come and show the film in Monaco.”

This way, the first screening of Into The Arctic 3- The Last Chapter was shown at the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco, where Mr. Trépanier met Prince Albert II.

“The exhibition of the paintings is going to go to Monaco, as the European Premier later this year.”

He talked about the changes to the environment.

“We realize what's happening. In 2006, there wasn't as much talk about the environmental effects on the north. My tour was to paint and spend time with the Inuits, one on one. They tell me about the changes - now we raise greater awareness.

‘The starting point for caring for a place is you gotta love it,’ he offered. ‘Bringing the exhibition down here, they’re really interested and they’ll come to see it.’

He began his wilderness painting with a trip to the rugged northern shore of Lake Superior and Georgian Bay for one month each season, with his wife, Janet, and their daughters, then two and five years old.

Yet, the far north, the Arctic, called to him once he had whetted his appetite for the startling beauty of the more northern landscape. It is a sizeable cost to travel to the Arctic and Mr. Trépanier’s plans to voyage several thousand kilometres across, eventually, the entire Canadian Arctic.

‘I thought, if I’m ever going to follow my passion it has to be now. When we first went to the Arctic in 2006, we took our daughters.’

In order to make this happen, he went to the people who were already collecting his works, from his travels to Lake Superior and other scenes.

He made a proposal to them: that they would fund his Arctic trips by buying, sight unseen, the paintings he would produce from his Arctic travels.

‘Fifteen of our collectors bought painting sight unseen,’ he told us: ‘If they had not shown faith in me, if we were to take the commitment to do three tours if these people showed their faith in me, I had to have faith in myself.’

That faith was honoured and, while the work was tremendous so were the rewards.

Following the first expedition, in 2006, he began to look for sponsors to become involved in what he was doing, with a long term view of what he could achieve.

‘I started calling airlines in the north to be sponsors. Companies came on board with equipment. These trips were to be a combination of art and films because I am also a film maker.’

He answered a question: ‘Am I getting political? Well, with my own voice- I want to create this bridge between people through my art. The first exhibition of the paintings in the United States was at the Embassy of Canada in Washington, D.C. In my last film, exhibition centres of power are seeing it; even though they’re so far removed from it, still now, they can be aware they can see it.’ He went to tell us his news, ‘I got a letter that, in October, I will be going to Iceland to the Arctic Circle Assembly. They must political scientists to go we’re taking our film to this. They flying me out there to show my film and do a q and a. They only have two films a session and ours is one of them.’

His comment about his recent past: ‘The last few years have been snowballing. There was even something about the films on Facebook from Seoul, Korea. I’ve got 20 paintings to finish.’

In 2015, at the end of his hike on Baffin Island, painting Mount Thor, in particular, he was picked up at Pangnurtung by One Ocean’s Expeditions’ small ships, on which were his wife, Janet, 13 of his clients and other guests, taking an amazing 11 day tour of the coast of Baffin Island.

In his words, ‘When I’d done my hike, I got on the ship. There was Janet and 13 clients. Some of those clients are here in Montana. We have the opportunity next August to go to the most northern community in Canada, Grist Fiord.’

Once our conversation was done, he was headed off to Yellowstone National Park, where he had never been, and which, established in the 1870s is said to be the first national park ever created.

He holds a lengthy list of awards and acknowledgements, including Top 100 Living Canadian Explorers for his many thousands of kilometres of hiking to extremely remote places in the Arctic and his astonishing body of work, resulting from those travels.