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AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2010

FEATURES

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Edmonton-born musician and artist Cam Wallace paints portraits that are so realistic and lifelike, it's sometimes difficult to tell if you're looking at a painting or a photo.

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Four Canadian soldiers from Winnipeg smoked most of the competition at the World Police and Fire Games, bringing home the silver medal.

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Celebrating a birthday? This new feature can be the icing on your cake! Send along your birthday pics—they may appear on this page in a future issue.



Cam Wallace's *Sipper*, 2009; acrylic and oil on canvas.

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Cam Wallace's approach to painting results in a breathtaking form of realism

by Debbie Marshall, Edmonton



PHOTOS: © CHRISTY DEAN

"The Tempest" 2009; acrylic and oil on canvas; (H) 91cm x (W) 91cm



"Shift Change" 2010; acrylic and oil on canvas; (H) 91 cm x (W) 91 cm

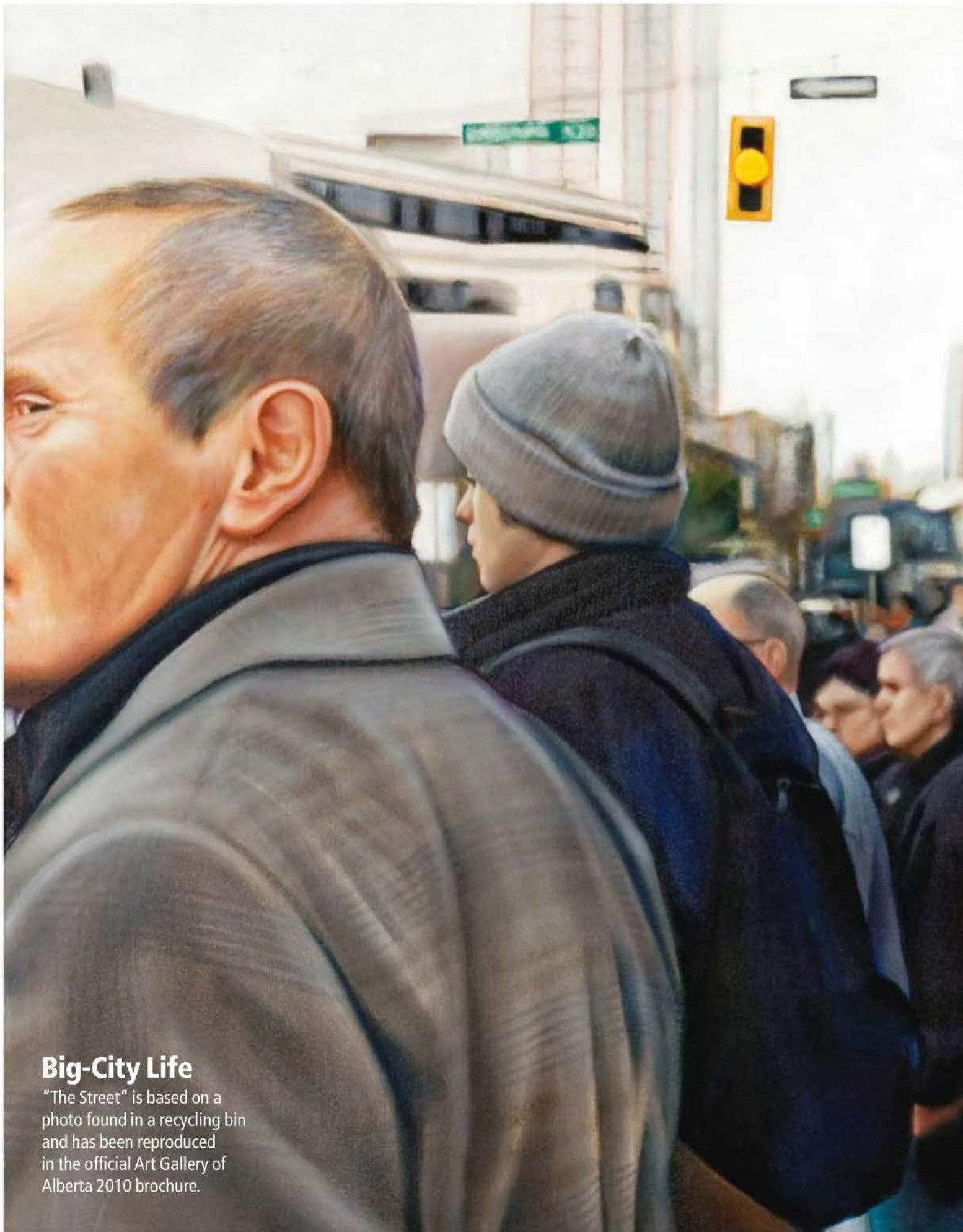
Family

"The Tempest" and "Shift Change" were originally painted as companion pieces: "The Tempest" is based on a photograph from Cam's wife Erin's family photo album, featuring Erin's mother at 12. "Shift Change" is based on a photograph from Cam's family album, and it depicts his mother and grandmother back in the '50s.

Paint by Photo

Edmonton's elegant Winspear Theatre is crowded on this cool September evening. Tonight's event, a fundraiser for the Northern Alberta Amputee Program, is being hosted by comedian Rick Mercer. Opening for Rick are the Wajjo African Drummers and Friends. One of those friends is a tall, burly, red-headed bagpiper in a traditional Scottish kilt. He grips the pipes under one freckled arm and places the mouthpiece in his mouth. Soon, the audience is swaying and tapping their feet as ancient Celtic rhythms pour from his pipes and blend with the rich West African drumming.

The bagpiper is Campbell Wallace, a 32-year-old musician and familiar face to anyone who enjoys traditional Scottish music in central Alberta. But what the Winspear audience may not realize is that Wallace is also a rising young artist whose paintings have found their way into art shows, private collections and corporate offices throughout the province.



Big-City Life

"The Street" is based on a photo found in a recycling bin and has been reproduced in the official Art Gallery of Alberta 2010 brochure.



"The Street" 2007; acrylic and oil on canvas; (H) 61cm x (W) 91 cm



"The Departure" 2004; acrylic and oil on canvas; (H) 48cm x (W) 32cm



"A Door" 2004; oil on canvas; (H) 102cm x (W) 152cm

Faces

Cam's paintings are often based on photos of people he knows, but sometimes he uses subjects he has never met. When he names a piece, Cam likes to maintain peoples' anonymity.

"Cam" (as he is known to his friends) was born in Edmonton in 1977. His father, Jack, was a musician, playing guitar and singing in clubs and dance halls across Alberta, while his mother, Heather Muir, was a certified highland dance instructor. Music was as much a part of their home life as hockey was for many other families. "If you heard the click of the guitar case opening up, you'd know there was going to be music," Cam remembers. He and his older brother, Kevin, were expected to play along. Musical instruments were always at the ready and the boys could choose from wood sticks and blocks, harmonicas and bongos. Young Cam, following his family's Scottish heritage, decided to take up the bagpipes, joining his first pipe band at the age of 14.

All the creative energy in the Wallace household sparked another talent in Cam. At high school, he would spend hours in the art room, experimenting with different media and creating sculptures, drawings and paintings. He became fascinated with the human figure. Learning of his interest, one of his teachers gave Cam a book on classical anatomy, telling him that "once you learn the perfect figure, you can draw the imperfect figure." Cam took the advice to heart, taking on extra assignments and laying what would be the groundwork for his future career.

In 1995, Cam began art studies at the University of Alberta. While many of his fellow students were caught up with abstract expressionism, he continued to work with the human figure. Skin tones, clothing and the way light played on a person's face were his absorbing interests. The school provided live models and Cam honed his craft, but as graduation neared, he still felt that something was missing. His figures seemed



"Spoken About It Once" 2004; acrylic and oil on canvas; (H) 32cm x (W) 48cm

isolated, unable to reveal much about the wider world. Cam wanted to express something deeper about the people he was painting, but wasn't sure how. Ironically, one of his former models provided him with the answer.

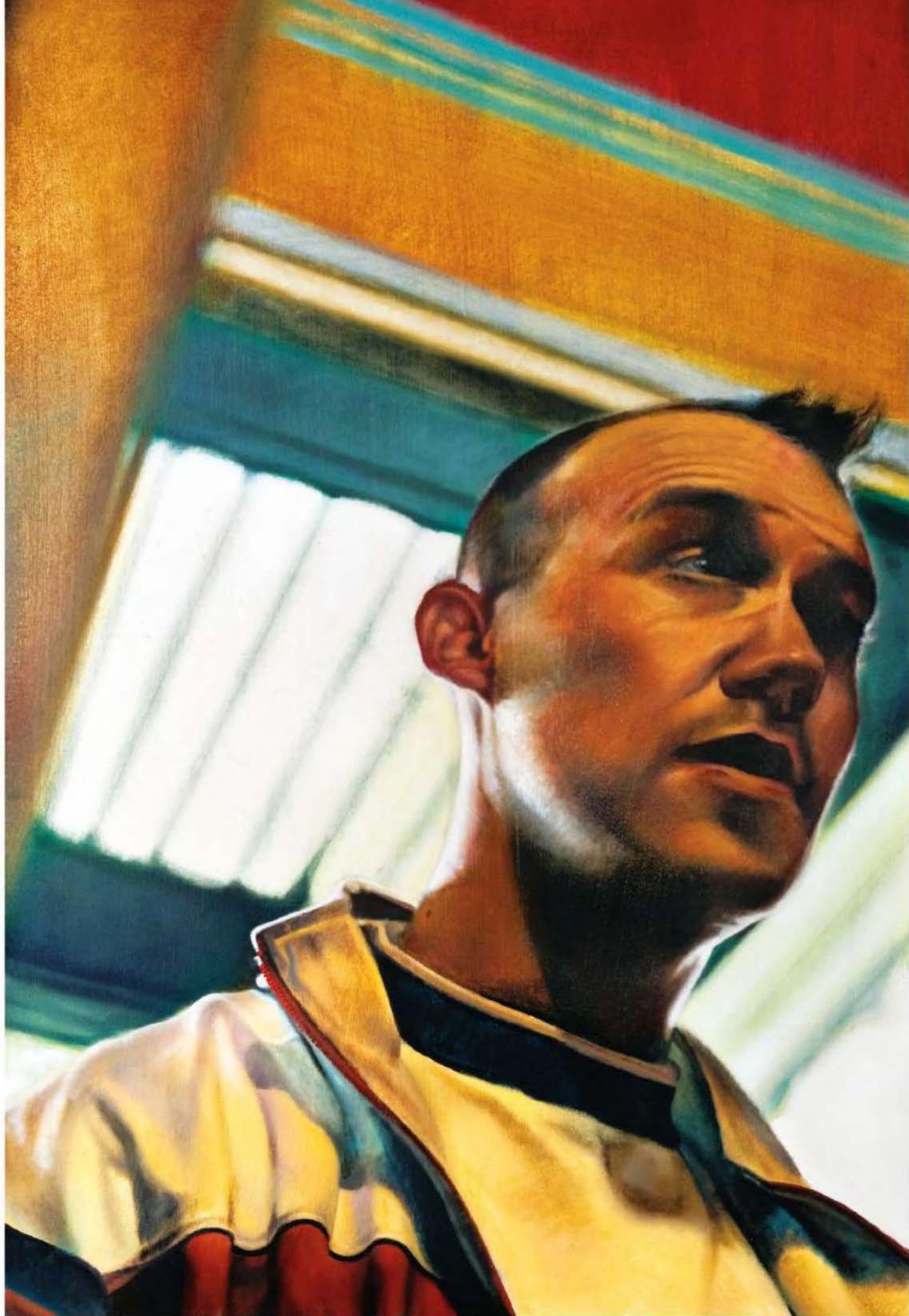
At his graduation party, the young woman handed Cam a package of photo negatives and urged him to develop and paint some of the images. Cam was intrigued. During his studies, he'd taken reference photos of his models, but found that the resulting paintings were stiff and artificial. Would this be any different? He agreed to take up the challenge.

One of the first paintings inspired by the photos was "A Door," a painting of a young couple chatting on each side of a bright yellow door. Other paintings were not as upbeat. "Do Not Discard" revealed a young woman with wild blond hair, asleep on a gurney in a hospital emergency room. In all cases, the images vibrated with colour, fabrics so softly textured and skin tones so luminous viewers couldn't be sure whether they were looking at a photograph or a painting. Cam was hooked. Soon he was collecting photographs from junk stores, recycling bins and garbage cans, and friends and family were scouring old family albums for anything that might feed Cam's new obsession.

Paintings started to pour from Cam's studio on Edmonton's south side. He began to participate in group shows at popular local venues such as the Harcourt Gallery, Margaret Brine Gallery and Art Gallery of Alberta. In 2005, Cam's first solo exhibition was hosted by Edmonton's Latitude 53 Gallery. Titled "Distant," it featured the quirky photographic portraits that were now his passion. Visitors and critics alike found that the paintings sparked their imagination and made them curious to know more

Discovery

These earlier paintings represent the beginning of an artistic road for Cam, when he was just beginning to explore the images he was working with.



"Spring" 2003; acrylic and oil on canvas; (H) 91cm x (W) 61cm

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- **EVERYDAY PEOPLE:** Canada is home to countless faces of humanity, and we'd like to see them all.
- **THE GREAT OUTDOORS:** Enter your best shots of our true north, strong and free.
- **ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL:** We'll go wild for your shots of insects, wildlife, or your favourite animal companion(s).

Prizes will be awarded for first, second, and third place in each category. Plus one photograph will be chosen to win the Grand Prize!

Contest deadline is August 16, 2010. Visit ourcanada.ca for all the details!

For complete rules, visit ourcanada.ca or write to: Prize Award Administrator, Reader's Digest, 1125 Stanley St., Montreal, QC H3B 5H5.



about the people he had brought so vividly to life. As one reviewer pointed out: "Looking at [Wallace's] canvasses is akin to being dropped into the middle of a story."

The success of "Distant" gave Cam more confidence. "People were getting what I was trying to say. While some people found certain images disturbing, others found them merely sombre or even funny" says Cam. "It's like bagpipes—some love them and others don't. There are different interpretations, which is what I want." The Art Rental and Sales of the Art Gallery of Alberta accepted Cam as an "artist consigner" in July 2006 and his work was soon hanging in corporate offices in the Edmonton area. According to manager Heather Hamel, Cam's work is developing a growing audience. "His art practice is closer to photo realism than any other artist with Art Rental and Sales," says Heather. "I'm continually surprised and captivated by Cam's images."

Today, in his small, cluttered studio on Edmonton's south side, completed paintings are carefully housed in a wide wooden rack along one wall while paintings in progress cover all other available space. Pots filled with brushes stand on a table next to an easel upon which sits one of the portraits in his new "Hat Series." For the past few months, Cam has been gathering a series of intriguing photographs of women wearing hats. In his paintings, he substitutes these hats for alternative headgear: A woman in pearls and a cloche hat from the 1930s is suddenly wearing a wintry knit hat, the kind with long, braided tassels. The result is disconcerting, funny and surprisingly modern. The finished paintings will form the basis of a new exhibition. Cam is also busy with commissions, from a painting of a local builder to a portrait of a city lawyer.

Cam's music continues to feed his artwork. "When I'm stuck or the painting isn't going well, I'll stop and play the pipes," he says. "Then I'm ready to go back to work." He keeps his musical skills honed as an active member of the local Ben Nevis Pipe Band and a volunteer teacher with the Edmonton Girls' Pipe Band.



Cam's friends also continue to send him photographs. As he dips his brush into a pool of cerulean blue paint and puts the final touches on yet another painting, his wife, Erin, comes in and hands him a fresh delivery. Out spills a collection of sepia postcards of Victorian ladies and colour photographs of 1970s rec rooms. "Just what I was looking for," smiles Cam. ■

TO LEARN MORE about Cam's work or contact him, go to www.campbellwallace.com

Bonus

To see more of Cam's paintings online go to ourcanada.ca/wallace