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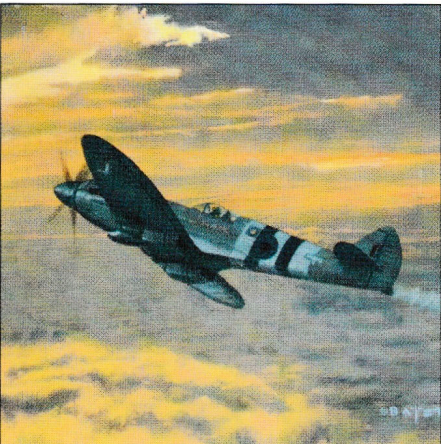
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PAUL VAN GINKEL

Embracing the Challenge

By Mary Nelson



Paul Van Ginkel will tell you he's an all-in kind of guy. Every time he does something, he challenges himself to do it better than ever before. That kind of tenacity and ambition paid off in early March when Van Ginkel, who lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, learned that he'd been nominated for the prestigious Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Distinguished Artist Award. The winner will be honored at a ceremony in September.

Although he's not a stranger to

awards—there have been many—he was particularly pleased that his patrons were so insistent on nominating him to be recognized for his outstanding achievements in the arts. “It certainly was a surprise and an unexpected honor,” he says. “If I win the award it would rank as my most valuable and prestigious because of not only the

competition but the many [artistic] areas they consider.”

Van Ginkel's art, style, and technique are certainly worthy of recognition; so is his generosity as he gives back to the community by donating his original

paintings and prints to a long list of fundraisers and charities. For example, two years ago, revelations

“What happened to me that day changed my destination.”



of a century of residential school abuse brought to light the horrific discovery of 215 unmarked indigenous children's graves in Kamloops, British Columbia. Van Ginkel, whose altruistic reach is as wide as his artistic endeavors, responded by donating 215 prints from his indigenous painting, *Nature's Playground*, which brought more than \$46,000 to Native charities.

Van Ginkel chose to become an artist because it gives him profound pleasure. "[Painting] helps me to

discover who I am and provides a tangible record of my life experiences and priorities," he says. "In making it my livelihood, it also creates an extremely challenging—and rewarding—business platform and opportunity."

He could just as easily have studied engineering and joined his two brothers in the family's construction business but, during his last year in high school, he realized it was time to consider what to do with the rest of his life.

(Above) Cowboy Paradise, oil, 36" by 80"

"To celebrate the millennium, the Calgary Stampede decided to bring its horses from its ranch outside of Calgary to the annual July Stampede the old fashioned way – overland with cowboys as opposed to truck and trailers. This epic event took about five days. Because it was so popular, they did it again five years later in 2005. This painting depicts that event."

"I loved creating art," Van Ginkel says. "I was accepted into the



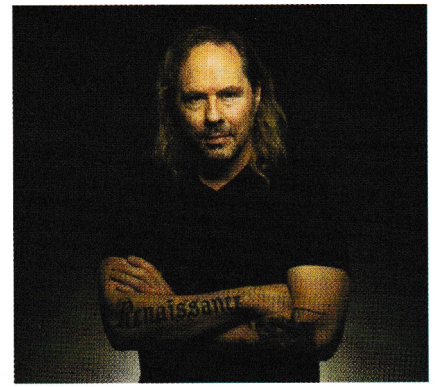
Ain't Messin' Around, oil, 60" by 40

"In 2001, I attended the Artists Ride, a photo shoot in South Dakota. Eighteen years later, I painted this piece from that shoot."

Alberta College of Art [now The Alberta University of the Arts] in 1979, where I majored in visual communications." He claims he was merely an average art student—but one with potential, a can-do work ethic, ambition, and his father's business acumen. During his final year at the college, he went to work as an edito-

rial illustrator for the "Calgary Herald" newspaper. He also worked as a freelance illustrator, created fine art paintings, and earned a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Syracuse University in New York through an independent study degree program.

While working at the "Herald," more than 1,000 of Van Ginkel's il-



ustrations and graphics were published, and he earned a National Newspaper Award for one of them. He loved working at the paper and was energized by the fast pace and deadlines but, in 1990, he resigned to pursue fine art full time.

Although known for his Western art, Van Ginkel says he embraces the challenge of painting many different subjects, which inevitably inspires new techniques and styles, and seeks stimulation by visiting art centers around the world. He's used many mediums, but prefers painting with oils. "I find I can capture my creative objectives most effectively with oil," he says, adding that he's an expressive, painterly, representational artist.

"Over the years people have often said they can always recognize one of my paintings [despite the variety of subjects]," he says. "So I believe it's not so much that I primarily paint Western scenes, it's more my expressive, confident brushwork, and palette." Using a routine that gives his art consistency of color and feel, Van Ginkel lays out the same 14 colors for each painting, although not every color makes its way into each piece.

His fascination with Western subjects began when Van Ginkel was about 10 and traveled with his family from their home in Winnipeg to the Annual Calgary Stampede. "I became fascinated with cowboys and Indians," he says. "We moved to Calgary in 1973 and quickly realized that the annual event is largely the essence and identity of the city on a global scale."

Painting Western scenes seemed to be a natural progression.



History in the Dust, oil, 40" by 70"

"This is a custom painting for the Calgary Stampede. For the majority of the 100 years of chuckwagon racing there were four wagons and four outriders per wagon. Then there were just two outriders per wagon. Then to make the event even safer, last year they decided on just three wagons and two outriders per race. So my painting depicts the current three-wagon race. However, upon closer examination you will see the fourth wagon on the right 'in the dust.' In addition to this painting being reproduced into paper and canvas (a Giclee) print, the Stampede will also reproduce it on a 40-foot exterior mural to be displayed on the Stampede grounds."



Posse Paradise, oil, 42" by 72"

"In 2001, I attended the Artists Ride, a photo shoot in South Dakota. Nineteen years later, I painted this piece from that shoot."



Light Up, oil, 50" by 50"

"In 1999, I attended a photo shoot in Jordan Valley, Oregon. From that shoot I painted many stagecoach pieces, including Jesse, a 'quintessential' cowboy."

In 1991, Van Ginkel began to show his work at the Calgary Stampede Western Showcase—and has done so for 20 years since then. In 2007 he was the first fine artist chosen to paint the annual Stampede poster. Prior to that, a commercial agency generated the posters, and 25,000 copies were—and are—distributed

worldwide. It was a coup that shaped the trajectory of Van Ginkel's career.

His bold and expressive art—whether Western subjects, dancers, portraiture, floral, First Nations, or travel—is an extension of Van Ginkel. "I'm rarely preoccupied with technique," he says. "Rather, I allow the painting's subject, expression,

and voice to dictate the type of visual life or language it should have. I feel each painting is a creative expression similar to a piece of music, dance performance, or poetry. For me, the symbolic ritual of signing the painting represents the completion of the piece. However, it's also the beginning of its long journey

through an unknown future.”

Van Ginkel creates honest, original, passionate, and powerful images that he hopes impact people’s lives in some small way. He is particularly fond of equine subjects. “I’m intensely drawn to the beauty, passion, power, and history of the horse,” he says. “I can execute a diverse variety of moods and compositions—from a small painting of a single quiet foal to a large canvas of over 160 stampeding horses to an abstract and impressionistic stallion piece.”

His pursuit of art has taken Van Ginkel to many exotic places, including Italy and Spain, and he’s traveled and lived in a number of Canadian cities. After living in Vancouver for about six years, he returned to Calgary in 2002. The following year, at a social function there, he was reacquainted with Kristin, an architect and the daughter of his parents’ friends. Both of them single at the time, they had what Van Ginkel calls an “accelerated relationship.”

Later that year, they purchased a half-acre of land on a slope on the western edge of Calgary and, in 2004, traveled to Mexico in search of treasures that Kristin could incorporate into the design of their new, custom-built home. “We ended up filling a 54-foot container including four 400-year-old doors, all our light fixtures, furniture, etc.,” Van Ginkel says. While they were there, they also married in a private ceremony in San Miguel de Allende.

After the birth of their daughter Isabella in 2006, Kristin quit her architectural job to become a full-time homemaker. That same year, the couple moved into a 6,000-square-foot home they had designed and built that included Van Ginkel’s studio and gallery. For seven years they hosted private art events in that beautiful space on a slope west of the city. But, when plans were underway for a road to cut through their property, they sold it and moved to a new neighborhood, and Van Ginkel moved his studio to Inglewood.

Now 63, he is still giving his all to painting—and works on only one at a time. “It gets my full attention and, thus, records a moment in my




War & Destiny, oil, 72" by 48"

“This is a portrait of my friend Gerald Auger. He is a Canadian actor, producer, writer, entrepreneur, and motivational speaker of Woodland Cree descent.”

life,” he says. “I’m also mindful that one painting often inspires another, so the process of creating remains flexible and fluid.” Despite having a business and master plan for his work, he remains all-in for change and evolution.

Although he’s been an artist for 40 years, Van Ginkel feels as though

he’s in midcareer and can’t see himself ever winding down or retiring. With so many subjects and ideas to explore, he believes his best work is yet to come. 

Mary Nelson lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.