

THE ARTISTS WHO CREATED THE ART AT
QUEEN'S PARK

 The *InFormer* 

Interview with Bernard Poulin

by David Warner

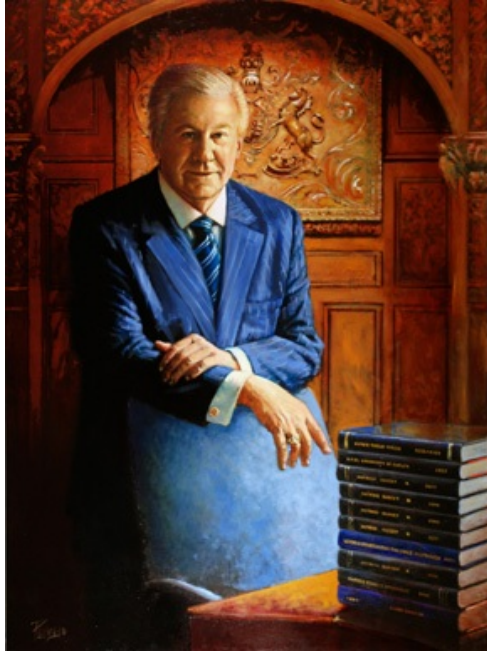
“Art is the most potent measure of the heartbeat of a nation, the colour of its imagination and a sign of the intensity of a country's commitment to the well-being of its citizens.” - Bernard Poulin

It is 1959 and an exasperated father tells his son that something must be done with all the paintings piling up around the house. So the 14 year old, a couple of paintings tucked under his arm, heads to a local furniture shop. What happens next sparks an artistic career spanning more than half a century and continuing to this day. The owner of the shop not only wanted the paintings young Bernard had, he wanted more. Bernard would have been happy to provide them, but tells the shop owner that he doesn't have the required art supplies. Back to Bernard's house go the shop owner and the young artist where the proprietor tells the parents he will purchase the needed art supplies and the cost will be put against Bernard's wages.

Bernard Poulin, at age 9 and growing up in Windsor Ontario, knows he wants to be a portrait painter. His mother (Marie-Jeanne Lauzière-Poulin) is from a musical family and understands her son's yearnings. His father (Joseph Aimé Poulin), on the other hand, doesn't. And so, while some emotional support was there, the practical financial support side was not. Nonetheless, *“when my dad went to Paris on a course for diesel mechanics, he spent all of his spare time visiting the Louvre to try and understand why I was so passionate about painting”*. The painter's father was a practical man. He knew his eldest son had to learn how to fend for himself while honing his skills in the craft he aspired to. From him Bernard learned that being hungry (being a “starving artist”) was not an option.

But Bernard Poulin had difficulty learning the trade of his dreams. In the sixties there were few art schools available which encouraged traditional skill set acquisition. And so he got his hands on as many art books as possible and in 1975 bought a ticket to Italy. The galleries and art museums of Florence became his 'home'. There, he fashioned his own personal education program that included copying the great painters, such as *Michelangelo and Caravaggio*.

In the end, Bernard Poulin's artistic expression reveals itself in a variety of ways; sculptures, murals and portraits. Three very different types of art, yet each with its own attraction.



Poulin's portrait of Hon. Ernest (Ernie) Eves, Premier 2002-2003 at Queen's Park

“There is a sensuality about sculpture. Murals focus on important public matters. A well done portrait reveals personality.”

Poulin sculpts in bronze using the lost wax process (a method whereby molten bronze is poured into a wax matrix embedded in sand). The flowing metal replaces the evaporating wax and once solidified, it has the form of the original wax creation.

As a muralist, he has created several three-dimensional projects using acrylic, black marble, maple and sometimes bronze. These can be found in the lobby of the Children's Hospital of Eastern

Ontario, the Ottawa Children's Aid Society and the Solange Karsh Centre for Medical Research.

In addition to being a prolific, acclaimed visual artist Bernard lectures, writes (11 books), appears on television, is a qualified elementary and secondary school teacher and was once a professor of Special Education at Ottawa University and Laurentian University in Sudbury. He has worked in the fields of special education and in the treatment of children and families dealing with emotional and social maladjustment issues. Between the years 1973 and 1978 he was a member of several psychiatric teams at the Royal Ottawa and Ottawa General Hospitals during which time he co-founded the francophone unit of the MF McHugh Schools, a therapeutic academic service for institutionalized children suffering from emotional difficulties.

In 1966 he founded “Mon Ecole” - the first French school in Ontario for institutionalized children. In 1967 he started the first special education services for French speaking children of Ontario at the Conseil des écoles séparées in Ottawa.

In 2011 the Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie internationale (the association of the world's French parliaments) conferred upon Bernard the title of Chevalier (Knight) of the Ordre de la Pléiade in recognition of his international efforts in both the visual arts and the French fact.

There is passion in his voice as he explains the importance of art in our society. Artist, teacher, writer. Bernard Poulin continues to enhance the social fabric of Canada.