

Artist to Collect

Douglas Edwards



Misty Pond, 48" x 72"

The Sky's the Limit

written by Lorie Lee Steiner

People familiar with his work often make comments like, "I was traveling up north and the sky was so beautiful, I said to myself, "That's a Douglas Edwards sky." What a fitting compliment for an artist who paints with his head in the clouds – capturing the ever-changing heavens with a dreamer's touch.



Cloudscape, 46" x 72"

Douglas Edwards was born in Toronto, where he grew up in Hoggs Hollow the third of five sons. His mother was, and still is, a professional opera soprano and a founding member of the Royal Conservatory of Music. She was also a good painter, having taken art classes from W. J. Phillips in Alberta when she was young. All five of her sons were instructed in music in one form or another and were raised to explore their individual talents.

With a background in both music and art, Douglas believes the two disciplines are closely related in their expression and creativity. But it

was art that became his true calling. "I always had a unique vision and poetry that I wanted to express in a creative way. I grew up looking at paintings and art books and being encouraged through lessons at the Toronto School of Art."

High school teacher, Mr. Pascal, saw great potential in Douglas, then a Grade 8 student, and asked him to paint the school Christmas card. The card was so well received it was used year after year as a fundraiser. Douglas was also asked to do some illustrations of official uniforms for a military book, and his portrait of a Colonel in the Royal Canadian Horse Guard still hangs in their office.

After completing high school, Douglas enrolled

in a two year course in commercial art at George Brown College, but soon realized that commercial art was too mechanical for his creative aptitudes. He found he was much better suited to the fine art program at the Ontario College of Art and after studying there for four years he deemed it "a tremendous experience. I cannot count the great influences. Some teachers who stood out were Jerry Lazare, Richard Nevitt and Peter Mah, teaching me oil painting technique, anatomy, and force and expression respectively."

In his fourth year, he was accepted to study at the OCA off-campus studies program in Florence,



Fosseau Falls, 36" x 48"



Wildflowers, 36" x 48"



Summer Fields, 32" x 48"



Vista, 48" x 72"

Italy. "We had one teacher, John Inglis, who was very encouraging and helpful. I believe, through osmosis, I became a true painter, being on my own and surrounded by da Vinci and the great masters of the Renaissance. Our studio was above the piazza where Michelangelo played soccer, or so I was told. There were 25 students, many of whom were good painters and very influential to me, among them Rudolf Stussi, who still shows his work in Toronto."

During his stay in Florence, Douglas took the opportunity to travel and visit galleries throughout Europe, an experience that helped inspire his painting style today. "I am influenced by Monet and the other French impressionists, as

"go there and be free." His technique involves extensive 'on the spot' painting, the result of which he takes back to the studio as a reference for larger work. He finds the hardest part is coming up with the concept, but once he starts, apprehension goes by the wayside. It is oftentimes hard work and long hours and when it isn't working the way he wants, a painting may have to be set aside for a time and resumed when he can see it in a different light. "I treat every painting as a new experience," Douglas says, "and each time I make sure I learn something about colour mixing or composition, et cetera. That way the expression and poetry can continue to flow."



Green Garden Chair, 30" x 40"

well as 19th century artists like John Constable and John Singer Sargent. But I'm also influenced by the great Canadian landscape tradition of Jefferys, Phillips, Beatty, of course the Group of Seven and many others. I admire paintings with a strong sense of composition, colour and tone. Among present day artists, I like Philip Craig, John Hartman and Joe Plaskett."

A double garage renovated into a studio, functions as both work space and think tank. Replete with books, posters and at times original paintings by other artists, Douglas feels he can

He has explored watercolour, acrylic, pastel, print mediums and sculpture, but always harkens back to the feeling of freedom and inspiration that came with his first oil paintings. "I paint now mostly in oil as I like the slow drying time and direct painting and mixing on the canvas. I have painted on canvas, board, ceramic tile and plaster (murals) and I sometimes use watercolours on trips as they are very portable."

Douglas has a lengthy repertoire of portrait commissions, including one of Laurence Coward, past president of the William M. Mercer



Birches, 60" x 48"



Country Stream, 36" x 48"

accounting firm, as well as paintings for the film industry – of note, a portrait of Gary Oldman for the movie "Interstate 60". He still does commissions, but mainly comes up with the concepts himself, enabling him to paint what he sees without too many restrictions.

"Portrait painting is very precise," he explains. "I still like to do them from time to time, but painting landscapes gives me more freedom to create in my own style. "What I call 'modern impressionism.'"

Not surprisingly for an artist who takes his nod from colour, mood and composition, landscape painting has eclipsed portraits as his stock in trade. When Douglas speaks of the great outdoors, it's obvious where his artistic sentiments lie: "Our family had a farm near Creemore, Ontario for 40 years, where I spent a lot of time. It was surrounded on three sides by the Niagara Escarpment and nature and was very private and a great inspiration for me growing up. The rolling hills, forests and lily ponds, farmhouses and barns and cattle were all themes in my work. Creemore is well known for archaeological sites of old Huron villages and you

can still find the odd artifact there."

Another favourite theme is the sky. Douglas loves the subtle colour variations and expression of freedom it gives. He often gets comments of admiration from viewers whose memories have been stirred by his powerful cloudscapes, all painted from his own life experience.

"Of course I have travelled extensively on painting trips all over Ontario and have favourite spots including Killarney, Muskoka and most of the east Georgian Bay shoreline. On one trip travelling down the French River canyon in



Glen Huron Hills 2, 48" x 72"



Fall Pond, 48" x 72"

a canoe, my friend and I got too close to the infamously dangerous Richelieu Falls where many, including the first Jesuit priests and white men to Ontario, met their untimely death. I still don't know how we survived but by divine intervention. It was not our time to go and I had more painting to complete."

Douglas has also painted Alberta and British Columbia and many locations outside of Canada. He has crossed Europe with his paints and exhibited in Sweden, Japan, Florence, Italy and New York City. On his next trip, he would like to paint the fishing villages of Newfoundland and admits, "I have been asked to do commissions of Nunavut in the Arctic but so far have not found the time to do so."

To someone starting out as an artist, Douglas has sage advice: "Paint all the time. In that way your unique vision and poetry will come naturally. Study art books and artists, even copy paintings you enjoy. I am different from other artists in that I have consciously not followed any trends in art but have tried to stick to my own ideas and be true to myself. I learn through osmosis of surrounding myself with art. By painting almost every day an artist can become a master of colour and expression."

The list of awards and accomplishments Douglas Edwards has earned since painting that first Christmas card is lengthy and impressive. He has become known and respected around the world as an artist, mentor, teacher and friend. His work is included in many private collections including the Toronto Stock Exchange, Bell Canada and the CBC. Douglas says, "People often remind me about some of the most publicly visible ones when they see them – like the large Georgian Bay painting in the Toronto Manulife building lobby at Bloor and Jarvis. I also get lots of comments on the appropriate 'large sky' paintings in the American Airlines lobby at Pearson Airport."

When not painting, Douglas likes to fish, hike, read and spend time with close friends and family. His favourite reward after a hard week's work is tasty gazpacho and salmon steak served up with a fine Toscana Castello di Vicchiomaggio Ripa della Mandorle 2005 .

And of course he always enjoys planning his next trip. Where to? One never knows ... for globetrotting artist Douglas Edwards the sky's the limit. You can see more of Douglas Edwards' artwork at Canadian Heritage Art Gallery in Kleinberg, Ontario or visit www.canadianheritageart.com or www.douglasedwardsart.com.



Glen Huron Hill Orchard, 18" x 24"



holsteins and wildflowers, 24" x 36"