

# jigs & reels

## Give and take

Visiting artists take in the scenery, and give back to the community

BY CRAIG WELSH

The Express

First impressions count, as the saying goes. So when painter Gerald Pedros hit Newfoundland, he was shocked by what he found. Not that the island is ugly, far from it. It's just...bigger than he thought.

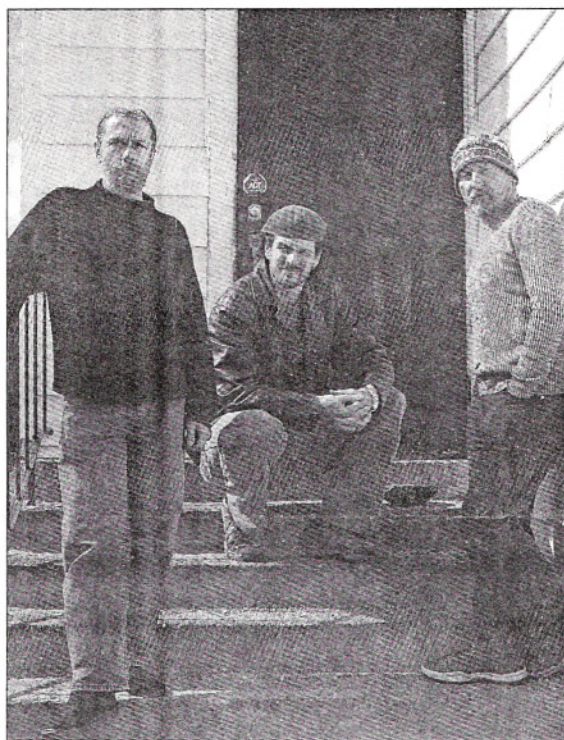
"One of the more unusual aspects that I've discovered since I came here was that I've been all over Canada and I never thought Newfoundland was this big," he says. "Today we went out hiking and went, 'This place is massive!' So we're trying to capture that a bit more in the art."

Pedros is visiting the province along with Scott MacLeod and Francis Caprani. Together, the three of them make up La Raza, a collective of painters living and working this month in the artist cooperative at Pouch Cove established by James Baird.

La Raza, while based in Montreal, was formed in 1988 in Mexico. The three men are established painters in their own right, but since '88 they have also travelled around the world as a group and painted in different locations. That's included Mexico, Germany and Ireland among other places.

While travelling painters may not be too unusual, La Raza is different in another way. After spending weeks painting in the area, they have a showing of what they've created. A portion of the money made from any sales then goes back into the local community. It's the kind of thing they've done before.

"The last project we did we helped build a hospital in Honduras with the money we raised," MacLeod says. "The idea is that we have some kind of commitment to the community in the group, where if we choose to take on a project, like the Honduran Medical Aid Project, we would sell a bunch of artwork and the monies that we got we would give to the doctors. The doctors would then bring it down to treat local villagers and build an actual hospital."



Craig Welsh/The Express

**La Raza (left to right) Gerald Pedros, Scott MacLeod and Francis Caprani. The three painters are living and working in the artist cooperative in Pouch Cove until the end of April.**

"We've done fund-raisers for Amnesty International, food banks, shelters...all kinds of different things."

Adds Pedros: "Doing projects that generate money, it's just our way of giving back to the local community. We've been so lucky to be artists."

They haven't decided yet where the money will go. As of last Friday afternoon, they were just concentrating on trying to see the Avalon Peninsula (with trusty guide Lori Butler) and get as much painting done as possible.

After all, the showing at the James Baird Gallery is tomorrow night. And in that time, they have to finish their own individual works and complete a massive mural that all three are working on.

"With the mural, what we are trying to do here is chronicle our experience," MacLeod says. "Because I was doing so much stuff on the Vikings and the Beothuks, I decided to start with the first people, work with the connections to the Europeans again, L'Anse aux Meadows, of course the green, white and pink...some other day by day things. The churches, the homes in the hills, the ships in the harbour."

"We have another 40 feet where we're going to carry on. Right now what we've been doing is gathering data, gathering photographs. I've been chronicling our experiences with other people and we're going to start putting in text and stuff."

Seeing the complete mural is going to be a brief experience. The plan is to display it and then have people select their favourite section of the mural. After that, the mural will be cut apart and sold.

Which might seem like the kind of thing that would upset painters, the 'desecration' of their art. Then again, the three men have worked together that long that they have an interesting relationship with their paintings. Once they finish a piece, they're done and move onto to the next one.

"The making of the art is the important part. The finished piece is gone," Pedros says. "It's not like it's precious. I don't want people to ruin it, but at the same time, I'm onto the next piece."

In Mexico, they left finished pieces behind for other artists to work on if they wished. They routinely get so far with a painting, get frustrated with it and give it to another member of La Raza to work on to see if they can do something with it.

Not every artist could do that. These three men have known each other so long it's like second habit at this point.

"I've worked on pieces and got so far and then just gotten totally frustrated," says Caprani. "Then I go to Gerald, give him the painting and say, 'Here, do something with this, will you.' And he adds something to it and it works."

The other aspect of La Raza's travels is they are constantly experiencing new things and trying to learn about new landscapes. In Newfoundland, that's meant crash courses in the geography and culture of the place.

The reaction to what they've painted is also going to be an educational experience. They're curious as to what people will think of what they've observed and created. Sometimes it can be a positive one. Other times...

"It'll be interesting to hear what they will have to say. Some of them will like it, some of them won't. That's part of the education. That's one of the reasons why you're an artist," Caprani says.

Newfoundland will also be staying with them awhile. All three say that what they've managed to paint during their few weeks in Pouch Cove will only be a fraction of their output. The photos they've taken, and the inspiration from the landscape and the people, will stay with them for years.

"I hope to come back," MacLeod says. "This is a great place."



La Raza

A section of the mural created by La Raza.

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