

## 'Mother Teresas of the art world'



Gerald Pedros, Scott MacLeod and Francis Caprani of La Raza Group with some of their pieces.

Paul Daly/The Independent

Three artists on a mission — not to change the world — just the smaller communities they visit like Pouch Cove

By Clare-Marie Gosse  
*The Independent*

To the casual, local onlooker, Newfoundland and Labrador may be as grey as ever, but within the old Pouch Cove Elementary school building, three outsiders are finding the colour.

Tucked away inside the dilapidated, white-washed building — now a residence for visiting artists — Scott MacLeod, Gerald Pedros and Francis Caprani of La Raza Group are living and working, busy collaborating on a vibrant, 40-foot long mural.

The piece, depicting their impressions of the essence of Newfoundland and Labrador, is to be featured in an exhibition running through May at the James Baird Gallery on Duckworth Street in St. John's. The artists will also show locally-themed pieces of their own, individual work.

More surprising than La Raza's unusual, relaxed, collaborative approach, is that the highly successful trio from the mainland (with roots in Cape Breton, Dublin and Europe) will be donating half of the exhibition's proceeds to the Janeway Children's

Hospital.

"Everyone, I think, somehow in life, wants to give something important back," says MacLeod, the group's youngest member.

Since their Montreal beginnings in 1988, La Raza has adopted the concept of using art as a means towards effecting social change, both through the imagery of their work and fundraising.

Among other projects, including organizing food banks and working with Amnesty International, the group raised money selling their work to fund half the cost for a new hospital in Honduras, South America, in 2003.

"We're not going to change the world, but we can change our communities or the communities we go visit," MacLeod tells *The Independent*. "So I think that's the impetus behind making a living and that obviously has to translate into cash dollars — and eventually it does."

Named after a slum area of Mexico City, where the artists worked and exhibited in the late '80s, La Raza found themselves inspired by the public art and murals of several Mexican painters.

The group has since cultivated a loose,

unfettered style, which is visible in the journal-like collage of local history and character exhibited at the James Baird Gallery.

"Newfoundland has been a place that's always fascinated us," says MacLeod, "and there's no better way to do it than to actually come here ... it's Canada but this really does feel like another country. These people are a people unto themselves."

Not unlike Caprani, Pedros and MacLeod.

As a collaborative piece, elements of each artist can be found in the mural.

Caprani, who is Irish/Italian and married with three daughters, often deals with spiritual themes incorporating women — he has a light, almost ethereal touch.

Pedros (also married with children) has a vibrant, bold, style which comes through in his recreations of icons and images from old Newfoundland churches.

MacLeod has a personal interest in archeology, which is demonstrated in images focusing on the history of the Beothuks and L'Anse aux Meadows, rendered with his loose, unrestricted approach.

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# 'Having the goods and being persistent'

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"Once (buyers) make their selection, we're going to have a red pencil and we're going to sketch a square and the three of us will sign it and we'll put a red dot on it and at the end of the exhibition they'll all be cut out, framed and then given," MacLeod says, explaining how the 40 foot-long mural will be sold.

The diverse mix of materials and styles in the collage sums up La Raza's own versatile approach.

The artists have used oil paints, acrylics, charcoal — "whatever serves the purpose" — upon a type of thin, plastic, non-absorbent parchment called mylar.

"It's a material used by architects ... it's easy to transport, you just roll it up, you don't necessarily have to frame it ... you can almost put anything on it, it's a very, very forgiving material."

And it makes for great layering. MacLeod points out a large painting of a woman he began as one of his solo projects. Unhappy with its progress he passed it along to Caprani, who added his own spin — and his own layers.

"That's how we influence each other and we kind of have this attitude that anything's up for grabs," says MacLeod. "If someone has a discovery we say, 'Oh yeah? Show us how to do it.' It's sort of a collective spirit when we do collective projects."

Caprani, Pedros and MacLeod are undeniably unique within an industry where most artists move uncertainly from one paycheck to the next.

"It's hard to make a living (as an artist)," MacLeod admits, putting La Raza's success down to "a combination of a certain kind of business savvy, knowing how to market and also having the goods and being persistent.

"We're just trying to give back what

we've gotten over the years and art is a platform for change and you can do good with it."

Caprani gives his own tongue-in-cheek summary.

"So we're like the Mother Teresas of the art world," he says with a grin.