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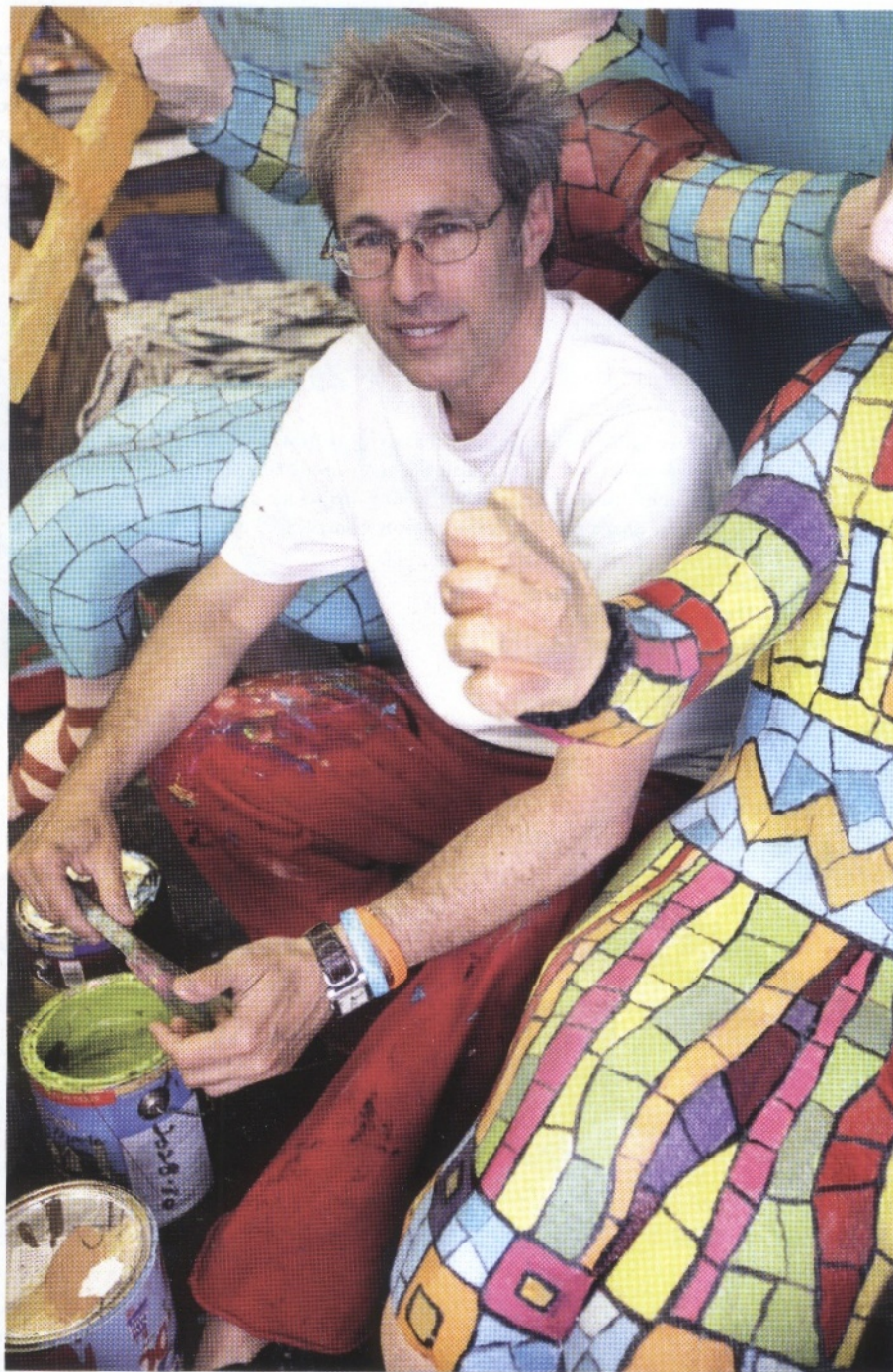
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■ Ian Leventhal, born in Toronto in 1951, is an accomplished sculptor, artist and interior designer whose whimsical and colourful style is instantly recognizable.

by Susan O'Neill

photography by Ashlea Wessel



The prospect of creating a mural on a 400-foot wall may seem a daunting task for many artists.

But for Ian Leventhal the challenge was a dream come true.

In fact the Toronto artist – who has painted countless murals on the interiors and exteriors of buildings around the city – says the bigger the project, the better.

“I love working big,” says Leventhal, who recently painted an expansive mural along a large wall in the Bathurst-Wilson Parkette.

The painting, which took about five weeks to complete, was inspired by 19th century French painter Georges Seurat’s famous *Sunday on the Island of La Grand Jatte*.

“That was just a dream come true,” Leventhal says of the project during an interview at his north-Toronto studio. “When I see this big blank wall I just want to get on it. I just attack the wall. I just go at it.”

Leventhal, born in Toronto in 1951, is an accomplished sculptor, artist and interior designer whose whimsical and colourful style is instantly recognizable.

And it’s everywhere.

If you’ve ever stepped foot inside a Second Cup coffee shop, you’ve likely seen his work. His designs for the company are featured in 150 franchises across the country, as well as four cafes in Israel. His commercial works also adorn restau-



Leventhal is best known for his colourful murals which can be found throughout the city.

rants, hotels, libraries, malls, hospitals and banks throughout the city.

"I consider myself a commercial artist. I have a client. It's never completely my idea," he says of his projects. "Eventually it's my style. I listen first, I interpret and throw back ideas. In the end it's always a marriage, always a combination."

Leventhal, who grew up in Weston and later moved to mid-town, studied fine arts at York University before taking courses at the Ontario College of Art and at Sara Lawrence College in Lacoste, France.

"Early on I worked a lot in the graphics end of things," he says, adding that when he did take on a job it was always in an art-related field.

He also never gave up his own art.

"I would have my exhibitions," he says, adding eventually the two careers merged into one. "I'm still in both worlds and depending on what's happening in my life it's my choice now if I want to divert completely from my commercial and do what I want to do."

"I guess I'm fortunate in a lot of ways, some artists do not like working with other people and work well on their own, they like a solo career. It's not that I don't like it but I do like the other side. I do like people. I do like activity and a little bit of frenzy and mayhem in my life," he says, adding, "The more I'm out there, I'm doing things I wouldn't have thought of myself, which I find is a good thing."

In addition to painting, Leventhal also creates sculptures, though he admits the medium presents a much more difficult

proposition than painting.

"Painting is an easy one compared to sculpture," says Leventhal, whose indoor pieces are often constructed from papier-mâché while his outdoor sculptures are fashioned of metal and resin and then painted in his trademark bright colours.

"It's like talking without some vowels," he says of painting without using reds, blues and yellows in his work, for which he clearly has a passion.

"I used to do a lot of book illustrations. I'd like to get back into that," he says, adding that he's also keen to create a Canadian stamp and a coin.

Leventhal is also working on a couple of film projects and is taking his Journey of Hope exhibit, which showed at the Blue Dot Gallery in 2005, to Jerusalem later this year.

But, his first love is painting in the great outdoors.

"I do love the outdoor pieces and I love the murals," he says, adding that he enjoys receiving comments from passersby.

"It's funny, when you first start a mural everyone looks at you like you're nuts. First of all they think all artists are a little off the wall anyway, but when you start they're all rolling their eyes and then they'll come back a couple of days later and say, 'Oh yeah. I kind of like that,'" he says.

"Most of the murals are meant to please. The odd time you get some adverse reaction," he says. "But none of the outdoor pieces are controversial ... I try to be very inclusive and very sensitive and make something that we are almost sure will be attractive, otherwise people will throw rotten eggs at it." ■

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