

A kinetic artist

*Peter Wilkins of
Clarke's Beach prepares
for next project*

By BURTON K. JANES

THE COMPASS

Sitting at a table in his garden in Clarke's Beach, Peter Wilkins looks around. Taking in the sights and sounds, he is obviously savouring his surroundings.

"The next body of work I'm going to start in September is Portraits of Canadian Musicians," he says. "From rock bands to pop stars, I will try and encapsulate the variety and greatness of Canadian music."

This accomplished and highly acclaimed artist is in his element. The 42-year-old is basking in the accolades that have been showered on his work in recent years.

But there was a time when Wilkins wondered if an artistic career would even materialize for him.

Born in London, England, Wilkins grew up in Leicestershire.

"I had a pretty idyllic childhood existence," he said.

After high school, he decided to become a writer. To pursue his ambition, he travelled to Prague, in the Czech Republic.

"That's a great place to write," he said.

It was also a great place to meet a wife.

A relationship developed between Wilkins and Michelle Mahoney, a travelling Newfoundlander. As they say, the rest is history. The duo exchanged nuptials. Moving to the province in 1998, they settled in Michelle's hometown,



Photo by Burton K. Janes/The Compass

Clarke's Beach artist Peter Wilkins stands beside one of his works of art.

Clarke's Beach. Today, they are the proud parents of four daughters — Amara, eight, Phoebe, 11, Xanthe, 13 and 14-year-old Zoe.

In his early 30s, Wilkins came to the realization that his natural talent lay not with writing, but elsewhere. He dabbled in art.

"I always returned to it, so I finally made the decision to go in that direction," he commented. "I said to myself, 'Alright, I'm just going to do art.'"

He has never regretted his life-changing decision.

Wilkins' approach to art can best be described as lens-based.

"Everything I do comes from either a still camera or a video camera," he explained. "I think it's always very important to expand the boundaries of art. I ask, 'How can I go a little bit further?'"

Wilkins aims to get inside his subjects.

"My portraits are much more trying to get the real person, to get a sense of who they are, where they go and what they've done with their lives; their aspirations and greatest moments. Over the process of a portrait, they can reflect on the best of times and the worst of times. I play with photographs in ways people haven't," he said.

While he does some still photography work,

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— Peter Wilkins

Wilkins specialized in creating video portraits.

He is perhaps best known for his kinetic portraits of 12 Canadian writers. This project critically engages such writers as Margaret Atwood, Douglas Coupland and Jane Urquhart.

Dr. Jennifer Dyer, humanities graduate officer, Memorial University, St. John's, described Wilkins' digital video installation as "simple and direct ... complex and quietly engaging."

For Wilkins, the word "kinetic" implies movement.

"A still photograph captures only one instant. But having video portraits is a slightly new step," he said.

The Portrait Gallery of Canada purchased

Wilkins' entire suite of 12 Canadian Writers in 2008.

His series of artworks include the Colour of Wine, which captures the depth and tonal shifts of several varieties of well-known wines.

Wilkins also served as the first artist-in-residence at Memorial University.

There seems to be no end to the projects Wilkins undertakes. He personifies kinetic energy himself. He is the epitome of energy and enthusiasm, bursting with ideas for innovative projects.

As for the future, his Portraits of Canadian Musicians project is currently in process.

First, he compiled a lengthy list of musicians "in all genres worthy and great," Wilkins commented. The difficult part will be to narrow down the list to 20. He will then contact the musicians and ask them to sit for their kinetic portraits.

"I'm immensely fortunate to be here," Wilkins said. "It's a brilliant place to live and bring up a family. You have space and fresh air. I think it's absolutely idyllic."

Which is exactly how he described his hometown in England.

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