

THE VANCOUVER SUN ARTS & LIFE

Shards on ice — a uniquely Canadian art form

Gordon Halloran is taking his original ice-painting technique to 2006 Olympics

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ABSTRACT ART | Gordon Halloran laughs when he's dubbed "the Dale Chihuly of ice."

But the often oversized installations of glass-blowing guru Chihuly are small potatoes com-

pared to Halloran's enormous canvases, which tend to be about the size of a hockey rink.

That's because the Sunshine Coast artist paints on ice, and not simply by splashing buckets of colour from red line to blue line. After a decade of developing a fascinating approach to placing

original abstract art under the surface of ice arenas, such as those at the World Figure Skating Championships in Edmonton and Calgary's Olympic Plaza, Halloran has been invited to Italy to present his uniquely Canadian artform during the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino.

"The medium for painting is just exceptional," Halloran says. "There's an amazing depth created, and all of this comes out of

what was for me a tremendous surprise when I started working. It was just a hunch that I had in the beginning."

Halloran began by emulating generations of Canadians and flooding his backyard for wintertime ice rinks.

"I became obsessed with them, out there flooding late at night, seeing the moon reflected off this slick surface and then holding people back from using it."

Realizing he could layer colours into the ice, Halloran experimented until he'd perfected a whole new technique. Trays about two metres square are filled a few centimetres deep with water, coloured in any shade and frozen in a walk-in freezer. Like stained glass, shards of ice can then be cut or broken and placed in another tray, with

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Portable ice tracks let his art run across floor, up wall

From **C1**

another colour, as it's starting to freeze.

"The piece that I put in starts to melt a little around the edge as the rest is freezing," says Halloran, "and the colours blend in incredible combinations."

The process can be repeated many times, "so that over two or three weeks I create pieces that have an amazing complexity."

Cue the Zamboni. With its big back blade shaving the ice surface, Halloran then places his compositions on the blank canvas of the ice surface before using a variety of nozzles to spray all kinds of colours into the air. Layers of patterns formed when freezing complete an amazing and enormous canvas.

"It reflects my work in film and theatre by bringing a lot of theatricality to the presentation of a painting, which for me was always a cool area," says Halloran. "You put it up in a gallery and people just watch from a distance. Now there's a scale that overwhelms people."

Halloran is excited by new technology allowing him to use portable ice tracks with extruded flexible tubing inside. Each piece is three or four metres wide and up to 80 metres long, allowing art that can run across a floor and up a wall, out the door and around the corner or

even up a mountain. The proposal that won him an official invitation to the Cultural Olympiad at Torino's Winter Olympics will test Halloran's skills to the limit.

"There's a series of forts, all different shapes and sizes, that run from the base of a mountain up and over the top. It's in the heart of the Olympic valley so it can be seen from many different ski hills."

"Underneath it all is this odd equation of bringing something from our landscape into that situation where the Renaissance started."

He'll travel to Italy this fall for a look at the forts.

"We want to make sure the scale of what we have in mind is something that we can pull off," Halloran explains, adding that he needs to raise about \$125,000 for the 2006 adventure.

Next spring Halloran and his team will work with the youth-legacy component of Vancouver's 2010 Winter Olympics to create a "challenge painting" with high-school students at Kerrisdale Arena. Halloran will train the students in his techniques, then let them loose for a day of painting that culminates in an evening of performance to unveil the resulting canvas.

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Gord Halloran at work on the Calgary Olympic plaza.

