Above Average

A Canadian painter puts his stamp on AIDS

August 1, 1996 By David Tinmouth

The story goes like this: “When I was 19, I came across this 1950s magazine ad with a line drawing of this handsome man -- just that ’average Joe,’ you know.” Reflecting on his early fascination, the 35-year-old Vancouver artist chuckles. “I think I was in love with that drawing, that fake guy.” Estimating that he himself was “average height, just an average guy really,” the fledgling painter figured it was only fitting to begin signing his canvases Joe Average.

Hence a name, if not a star, was born.

The attention he’s received lately, however, has been anything but a parallel with his John Hancock. Since the recent issuing of his One World, One Hope image on Canada’s first AIDS-awareness postage stamp (and the emblem of the XI International AIDS Conference in Vancouver), Joe Average has been delivering not only a daily awareness of the epidemic to hundreds of thousands of Canadian mailboxes but an awareness of someone living with HIV. Media attention has heightened Average’s personal and professional profile and, amusingly, added his presence to some pretty glittery social gatherings -- including an elbow-rub with British royalty. “It was hilarious,” he says. “’Joe Average meets Princess Di.’ There were lots of people there, but I stole the show.”

Still, Average remains true to simple ideals through modest means. “I’m not a major gallery artist. I’ve had offers but all they do is skyrocket your prices, and then where are you? Left with inflated prices. It’s not my style. It’s enough of a thrill for me to know that my roof and the food I put in my mouth come from art.”

Alongside Chagall and Lichtenstein, Average says his continual source of inspiration -- and his most important critics -- are children. “I’ve heard this story a few times now, that my paintings have stopped babies from crying. To hear that makes me cry.” It’s a response that achieves the Average goal: “Simplicity in art.”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Above-Average-1809-9335