

APPRECIATING THE ABSTRACT

PETER KIRKLAND TRANSFORMS THE NATURAL WORLD INTO ART

By **Nelia Raposo** | Photography by Nikki Wesley

Abstract artist Peter Kirkland thinks his work may exasperate the average person.

"It annoys some people. They want me to title it so they know what to think when they look at it," he says.

He never titles his work, choosing to number each piece instead.

"People relate to my work on a visceral level. They will look at my work and generate their own memories and interpretations," the 54-year-old Hamilton resident says.

That's the point: he creates abstract art so that people can establish the meaning of the work themselves.

An alumnus of York University's Fine Arts program, he creates and exhibits at Kirkland Lynch Studio Gallery on Spring Gardens Road in Burlington. It's across the street from the Royal Botanical Gardens, or behind it, depending on how you look at things.

"I suppose that most of the objects you see in my work are inspired by the natural world — geological formations, the endlessly interesting colours and textures of plant, animal and human form," he says. "My paintings generally depict what you might describe as biomorphic shapes; things that allude to but don't overtly imitate."

Most of his clients are private individuals, but a law firm in Hamilton bought five of his pieces a few years back. Search law firm Mackesy Smye online and you will spot his art prominently displayed behind a service counter. Other corporate clients include Pioneer Petroleum, Leggat Motors and Quatrefoil Restaurant.

Kirkland's creations are also available for purchase at different galleries in the Greater Toronto Area, like Crescent Hill Gallery in Mississauga.

Katie Cheung, Gallery Assistant at Crescent Hill, describes Kirkland as "very outgoing and approachable, and he is extremely knowledgeable in what he does."

"He's very passionate about his art and his style of work. He continuously experiments in his studio and he's very hands-on with his artwork," Cheung says.

Visitors who come in to Crescent Hill Gallery say Kirkland's work is very eclectic. It maintains the abstract style of painting without neglecting the form, the movement and the details, she explains.

"Some visitors have mentioned that it provokes a particular feeling within them while the subject matter in his paintings almost seem scientifically calculated, where the forms reminisce the diagrams in a science textbook," Cheung says.

The work has a sense of movement, making the forms appear dynamic yet integrated in the space, says Marla Panko, artist and curator at the Carnegie Gallery in Dundas. His art has a richness of colour; even in his drawings, the blacks are "rich, rich, rich black," she says.

When you live with a piece like that, it announces itself — it's not passive decorative art, she says. Fitting, since Kirkland himself is no wallflower.

In Burlington, Kirkland shares the studio gallery with stained glass artist Siobhan Lynch. The gallery is increasingly getting walk-ins. They often get people who come in and say they've driven by many times and always wanted to come and check it out.

"It is such a nice, open, light-filled space. It serves as a workspace as well as an exhibition space," Kirkland says. 🍷