

POP! art

VIBRANT CONVERSATIONS WITH
LUCAS JAMES COPPLESTONE AT THE
MCTAVISH ACADEMY OF ARTS

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Artist Lucas James Coplestone with his dog Freddie in his studio at the McTavish Academy of Art.

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“I LOVE PAINTING THESE ICONS BECAUSE YOU TURN ON THEIR MUSIC WHILE WORKING AND GET TO HANG OUT WITH THEM FOR A WHILE.”

It's a warm evening on the Saanich Peninsula. The sun is high over the waves of green country, with pops of light and shadow patterning the land. I'm cruising along a backcountry road on my way to the McTavish Academy of Arts – more fondly known as the Academy to residents of the area. The converted elementary school on McTavish Road has become a community hub since its inception in 2016.

This evening I arrive at the Academy to interview its resident artist, Lucas James Copplestone. Lucas is the owner and operator of LJC Art, a mixed-media company specializing in pop art portraiture, hand-pressed screen printing, graphic design and music. I hop out of my car and admire the outside of the Academy. The exterior walls, which were once uniform grey, are now a kaleidoscope of yellow, blue, pink and charcoal – reflecting the Academy's signature colours. Inside, it is entirely void of any institutional impression, but that sacred energy you can only get from young minds learning, thriving and exploring their own potential has been expertly preserved.

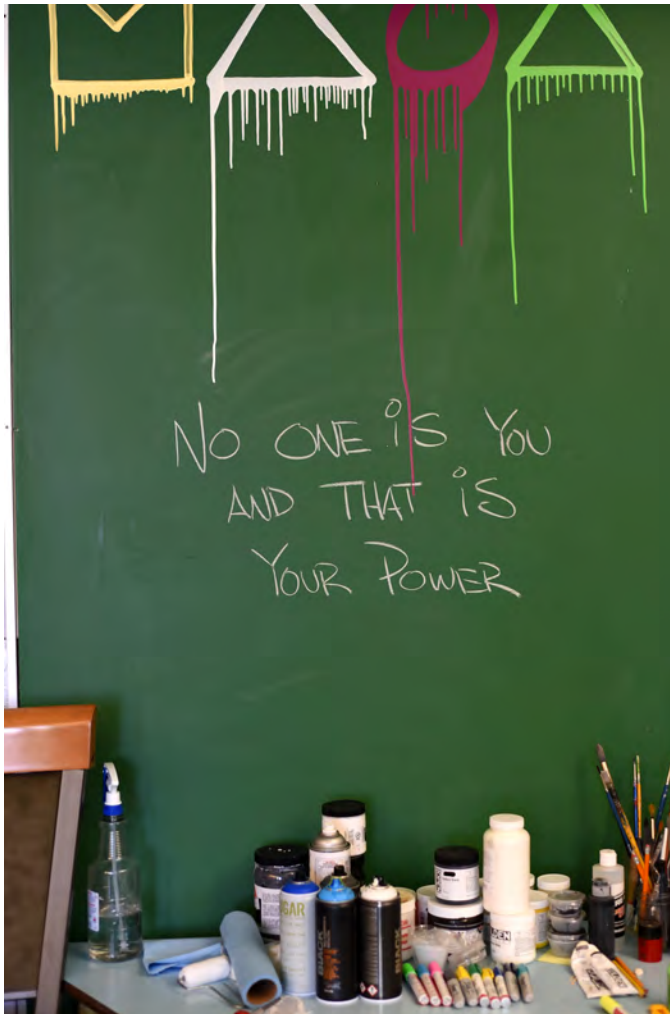
Old classrooms have been converted into yoga, dance and multi-media art studios, where a variety of classes are offered. There is a music hall that operates as a venue for events ranging from weddings to comedy nights, and it offers extensive views of the back field onward to Salt Spring Island.

Lucas's large art studio is flooded with natural light that washes over an enormous screen-printer in the centre of the room that is surrounded by easels with in-progress paintings in the artist's signature pop-art style. Lucas and his dachshund, Freddie, welcome me into the studio. Lucas is nothing short of vivacious; his charisma bounces off the walls into his art and our conversation.

“When I was in grade nine I went to art class and I made a vase, and the teacher gave me a C,” Lucas tells me. “My dad is an incredible artist, so I took in one of his paintings to show the teacher who thought it was just incredible, and I told her my dad thought my vase was incredible,” Lucas laughs cheekily. “My dad always said, ‘You can't put a grade on art,’ so I stopped doing art and creating in school at that point.”

Lucas grew up in a creative household, where all of his family members were artistic in their own right. “Where there was a TV in other houses, there was a drum kit in ours,” he explains.

After high school, Lucas pursued a career in the business side of aviation, influenced by his dad who was a designer for Boeing Commercial Airplanes. He landed a sales job in the industry. While home base for Lucas remained in Sidney, BC, his family continued to take summer trips to his dad's home in South West London, England to visit family.



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“My dad would take me to all the major art galleries. I remember walking up the stairs at the Tate Modern in London one day in 2008, and I saw this big picture -- it was called “Wham,” by Roy Lichtenstein. It was a pop art picture of my favourite airplane, a P-51 Mustang, and I thought: “That is so cool, I want to do that,” says Lucas.

Returning from that summer’s trip, Lucas began painting.

“My dad always had art supplies and canvases around, which enabled creativity at any time,” the artist explains.

Lucas began his career painting by creating a number of pictures inspired by Roy Lichtenstein’s Wham, and quickly honed his skills in pop art.

“I’m not great at blending colours. I like big sharp pop art. Silhouettes and big streaks of colour. I like things oversized,” he explains.

Lucas held his first art show called Rhythmic Vibrations of Colour and Sound in the industrial side of Sidney in 2009 and put all of his paintings up for silent auction.

“We sold 14 pieces and we actually did pretty well,” Lucas says with a smile. “So I left my sales job and started painting.”

Lucas was eventually commissioned to paint 100.3 The Q! radio station’s contribution to Victoria’s 2010 Eagles in the City campaign benefiting the BC Lions Society’s Easter Seal Services. Lucas painted a rock-and-roll-themed eagle called Radio Dada. It went on auction live at the Eagle Gala and it sold for over \$15,000.

“All of my closest friends were at the auction that night and the sale



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sparked the creativity in our crew. It gave the others momentum to begin creating. We started to focus more on the connection between art and music. My home in Sidney has always been an art-friendly environment, so we started hosting Art Night on Wednesday evenings,” says Lucas.

For over two years Lucas hosted anywhere between 10 and 30 people at his home for Art Night, where art was expressed through music, painting and cooking. Throughout that two-year period, Lucas continued to develop his own artistic talents. His pop art paintings were gaining an international following with pieces commissioned all over the world, and his paintings of iconic rockers were internationally renowned with fan favourites including Frank Sinatra and Jimi Hendrix.

“I love painting these icons because you turn on their music while working and get to hang out with them for a while, and catch a glimpse of who they might have been,” Lucas says.

Dedicated to continuing to develop his creativity, Lucas also began a successful hand-pressed screen printing business.

“I got into hand-pressed screen printing for two reasons. One because what an easy way for me to move my art around the city: on a T-shirt. A T-shirt sells for 30 to 50 bucks, and now my art is out there. The art is on the t-shirt moving around the city. Also, I am really into Andy Warhol – the old story of Andy Warhol – and how he screen printed, all hand-pressed,” says Lucas. “People now want to create their own brand or fashion line. We work with them to create that. They’re then monetizing their art and creativity right away.”

Lucas has worked with local fashion brands including Sitka and was commissioned to do a screen-print wrap of Victoria’s Canada 150 fire

truck. Lucas is also heavily involved in the art community of Sidney contributing to the city creatively and through consultations.

Eventually, Lucas and his two closest friends – now partners in the academy – Sean McNeill and Carl Joosse, got together and decided it was time to find a proper place to enable creativity at any time.

“Carl, who lives in Toronto, was looking to invest in property on Vancouver Island, so he said he would look for one with a barn or facility of some sort to accommodate the art nights which were becoming more and more popular. We ended up finding the elementary school and that is how the Academy was born,” says Lucas.

The academy has continued to grow and has enabled Lucas to inspire locals to invest in themselves creatively.

“The idea behind the Academy was to create a place for people to harness creativity and feel their best creative self. To know that their creativity has value and that they have the ability to monetize that into the future, or simply just create in a safe space. There are so many people who come to the Academy who don’t even know they are artists. Now they call themselves an artist. Whatever your medium is, whether it’s dance, yoga, culinary, agriculture, acrylics, screen printing – art is endless. Art is the way we set the table and make dinner,” says Lucas.

As our interview comes to a close, Lucas walks me through halls that are lined with an array of work by local artists, effectively filling the space with an undercurrent of energy that makes the school feel full even on this quiet night. I am filled with the impulse to create. Lucas is no doubt self-aware and a bona fide expert in his many crafts – but as I leave the Academy I wonder if he knows that beyond his tangible art he has also designed a pretty impressive ripple effect in the Saanich Peninsula arts community. **P**

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