

## by Cynthia Corsale

Evocative and thought-provoking, the paintings of David Hall are well worth seeing.

Hall, a Montreal-based artist, is currently displaying 14 aerial views of urban landscapes for his exhibition *Shifting Ground* in the Warren G. Flowers Gallery. His works portray places of human activity that are suspended in a moment of time, where man's imprint on land become eternal.

Influenced by the melancholic 1930's cityscapes of Hopper, Thiebaud's 1970-80's cityscapes, as well as the light and atmosphere of Turner's paintings, Hall presents us with his unique concept of place. "A place," Hall said, "is a psychic space of feelings and memories."

Hall's paintings are created through a blending process that combines personal experiences, memories and appropriated images or events. He chooses certain elements from these ideas of places, and manipulates them to invent entirely new areas. He doesn't reproduce any place already in existence; instead he paints a certain fictitious narrative that an urban dweller can relate to. The cold buildings, unseen population and impersonal aura evokes the feeling of detachment that one can have in a large city.

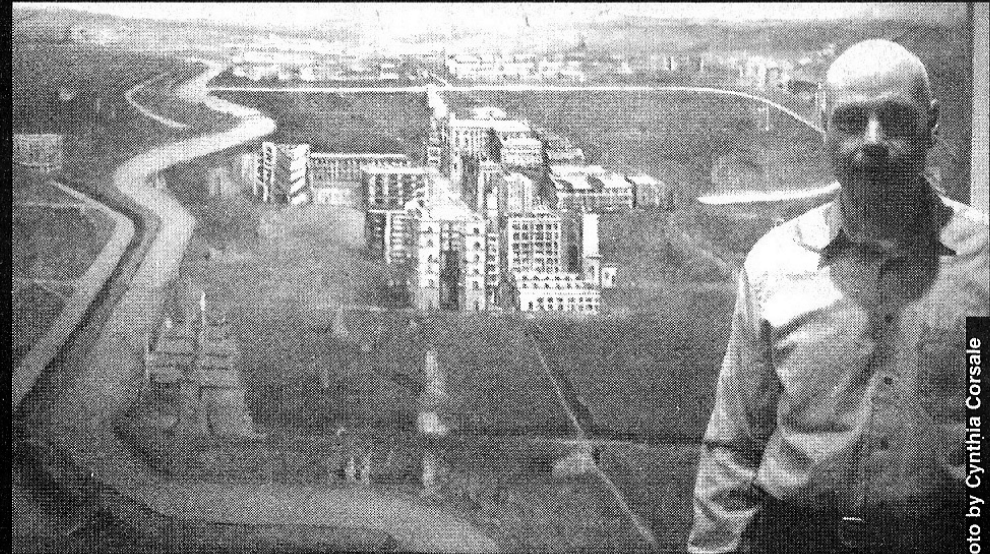
The artist sands away parts of his oil paintings to reveal underlying layers, creating a ghostly middle ground effect. This layer simultaneously reveals and conceals, aiding in the illusion of an abstract yet representational world confined to the edges of the picture plan.

Although the paintings show no human presence, they are not devoid of human life. Melancholic, lonesome and desolate, these places retain the imprints of humanity; infrastructures, societies and manipulated lands. Buildings, bridges and entire cities are left vacant.

Without a seen occupant, the paintings invite the viewers to project their own experiences or ideas into these spaces. The overwhelming sense of abandonment leads one to question whether the barren cities are a result of natural or man-made disasters. This is quite relevant today, where technology keeps advancing to uncertain ends and nature's resources are dwindling. "Human activity collides with nature," Hall said, "It's a fascinating kind of cataclysm happening on our planet: the forces of nature versus technology."

The results of the collision between technology and nature is readily seen in Hall's work by the imposing and aloof clusters of buildings together with the vast dying fields that surround them. Nature is not presented in harmony with the human structures. The environment of these places seem to be invaded by man's intervention; the land cut up and sectioned off with roads and canals. The destruction of nature by man is particularly felt by the urbanites who see nature carefully contained and maintained within the city.

The 14 works on display were carefully chosen by Joe Di Leo, curator of the exhibition and teaching associate in Dawson's Fine Arts program, for their less traditional, interesting twist on



Artist Dave Hall with his work, *Fringe*

photo by Cynthia Corsale

land and cityscapes. Particularly, Hall's unconventional viewpoints evoke a feeling of detachment, in the viewer, from the space. "There's a feeling of motion, a sense of adventure and abandonment, and a notion of search in the paintings," Di Leo said, "The paintings have a sense of expansiveness and infinity to them, but you still feel the end of the earth, that the entire global structure is still there. It's an oxymoron, the sensation of infinite and the notion of a small earth that can be quickly orbited."

"I wanted to show a blend of [Hall's] earlier and later works. Works with a great sense of distance to them that still leads the eye through the panorama," Di Leo said, "The barren look with a presence of human form creates a conflict. The clash between the natural elements and concrete structures, between technology and nature mirrors events in our contemporary era."

"These paintings illustrate a conceptual base, a poetic charm and an emotional content," Di Leo said while commenting on the importance of showing these works to Dawson students.

This exhibition runs until next Wednesday.