

Artist overwhelmed by response to first exhibit

By Julie Slack
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Rachelle Karon started painting four years ago when she found out she had Parkinson's disease. Now 58 of her colourful abstract pieces are on display at the Milton Centre for the Arts' Holcim Gallery until Sunday (Feb. 17).

The official opening was held Sunday afternoon and Karon said she was completely blown away by the turnout as well as by viewers' comments.

"I was floored by the people's remarks," she said. "People were coming and just standing there in front of a painting, staring at it."

"I've never seen this before in my life...the reaction."

An aesthetician for 24 years, Karon said she has always been creative and enjoyed art. Several years ago, in the middle of a facial she was giving to a client, she realized she had totally lost the feeling in her fingers. She searched for an explanation and her doctor sent her to a specialist.

"When my neurologist said 'you have Parkinson's' I looked at him as though he had struck me in the face," said Karon, 57.

After her diagnosis months later, she said she was feeling badly. To cope with Parkinson's, a disorder of the brain that leads to tremors, rigidity and difficulty with movement as well as coordination, she turned to art.

The result was abstract art that uses bright and diverse colours, rich in texture. The paintings range in size from smaller panel paintings to large, six-foot canvases with an exotic flair, perhaps in part



A new art show at the Holcim Gallery features the works of artist Rachelle Karon, who's pictured here with several of her works. The one in the foreground is an acrylic titled *Tree of Life*. *Graham Paine / Canadian Champion (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog)*

due to her South African roots.

"I needed to do something for me to deal with what's happening," she said. "I just started painting and people loved it immediately."

She said one particular visitor to Sunday's opening "was the cherry on top of the cake."

A man came and stood in front of the painting *'New Beginning'* and said there was just something about it that was different, she recalled, noting he was the last guest of the day.

In fact, Karon said, the painting was special to her — it reminded her of the six million Jewish people killed in the Holocaust. Being Jewish herself,

she said the piece was symbolic of the bloodshed, yet at the same time a new beginning.

"People kept coming up to it and commenting... everybody was drawn to it," she said.

She said painting large works of art isn't something she imagined herself doing, but her work has an impact on those she sells it to.

"People who've bought my paintings say, 'The painting changes the whole feeling of my home,'" she said.

She's pleased that she has already sold two pieces at the Milton gallery.

Now, as she finds her hands — especially her

dominant right hand — not responding, she said she uses her left hand to help hold her wrist when she paints. She paints with a pallet knife sometimes, but she said nothing will stop her now.

"I'm not giving up, even if I have to draw with my feet," she said, adding she can't believe she has produced so many works of art.

It didn't sink in until she started putting them up in the gallery.

"I never really believed this was possible until I saw the enormity of it all in the gallery," she said.

Julie Slack can be reached at jslack@miltoncanadianchampion.com or on Twitter @miltonmusing.

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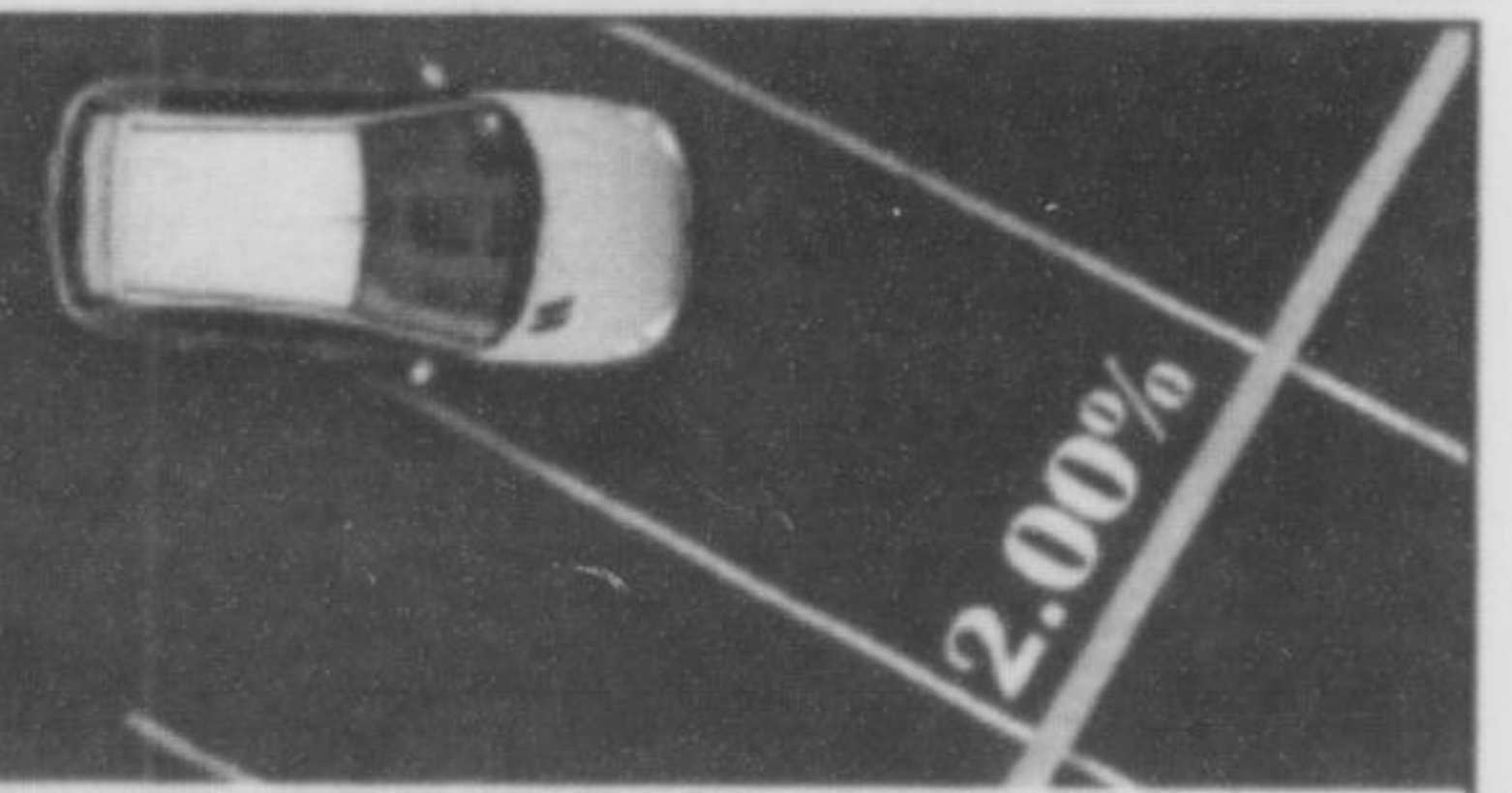
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295 Alliance Rd Unit 1E
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