

Local artist hopes to start a pop can revolution

by Carrie Brunet

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If you know Les Paterson, you may have already received a pop can post card in the mail.

The local artist has been crushing cans, pasting paper on the back of them and sending them through the mail to family members for years.

"I like to make the world a little more mysterious, a little more amusing," said Paterson. That social experiment is how Paterson knew that his latest art project would succeed.

The Pop Can Poll is a 1,000 crushed can collection that Paterson is turning into postcards addressed to Stephen Harper at the House of Commons. Sending mail to the Prime Minister or to your local MP at the House is free, said Paterson.

"This makes for a very inexpensive art project," he said. He spent much of the year collecting the cans in Toronto gutters.

However, once the thaw began, Toronto city workers quickly cleared away the refuse, and Paterson started to worry he wouldn't collect enough cans. Still, he soldiered on, collecting, washing and crushing the cans.

His job didn't end there though, he brings the pop can postcards with him to have others fill them out.

"You might run into me on the street," he said. "I've even been taking them to parties. One thousand is a lot of people."

He hopes to have 800 cans filled out by the time his show opens at the Lennox Gallery. He will leave 200 to be filled out by those attending the show.

Unlike other postcard campaigns, Paterson is asking people to write their own message, and hasn't coached any of his subjects to send a specific message. Instead, each person is encouraged to write their own message. So far the results have been varied.

"Some write about the war in Afghanistan," said Paterson. "Others write more personal messages like 'remember what your mother taught you,' or 'always try to be nice.'"

Paterson got a successful start on the art scene last year with his Marge Simpson Project which featured paintings that could have been created by the fictional cartoon character.

"The pop can poll has a similar appeal," explained Paterson.

"The authorship of the project is diffused," he said. "With the Marge Simpson Project there was a question of whether the paintings were mine, or Marge's, or the cartoonists for the Simpsons. With this project, there are 1,000 different people working on it."

After his show ends on Aug. 20, Paterson intends to dump the cans into mailboxes and send them off to Parliament Hill.

"I hope they are received in the spirit they were created," he said.

Visit www.lespaterson.com to find out more.