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Celebrated in the U.S., artist James Verbicky gets recognition in Canada

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# AN ARTIST'S HOMECOMING

*U.S.-based Canadian artist James Verbicky exhibits his work for the first time in Canada*

WITH HIS FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION IN VANCOUVER, which opened in April, Canadian mixed-media artist James Verbicky marked a milestone, a sort of right of passage, if you will. His triumphant return home as an accomplished artist came after he'd made a name for himself abroad.

It's a familiar route for many in the Great White North's art community. It makes recognition as a Canadian artist more than merely a function of his status as a native son, but a measure of appreciation of a tested creative force. "Canadians started buying my work once I was established down here," Verbicky says during an interview from his home in California. His hope now is that his work will gain greater traction on this side of the border. ☞

Kostuik Gallery  
1070 Homer St., Vancouver  
604-737-396  
[www.kostuikgallery.com](http://www.kostuikgallery.com)













*“If you look at my work, there are many messages in one piece.”*



“He was so excited to show in Canada,” says Jennifer Kostuik, the owner of Kostuik Gallery in Vancouver, which hosted Verbicky’s exhibition and sells his work. She will include Verbicky’s work in her contribution to the Toronto Art Fair in October.

Kostuik describes his work simply as “very cool.”


“Graffiti art is really popular, and you can find that in almost any country ... and collage work has always been popular ... but his work is a combination of the two. It’s a time warp, but it’s also very current. It’s extremely current,” she says.

Verbicky’s art reflects on the role media, advertising and branding play in attempting to influence and manipulate. He uses images and vintage magazine advertising to create three-dimensional works that are part collage, part painting and part almost sculpture. These abstract panels capture persistent messages and challenge viewers to see the influencing scripts differently. “If you look at my work, there are many messages in one piece,” Verbicky says. “It’s my voice. It’s my language – every piece I make. What I love to hear from collectors is that they are constantly seeing new things.”

Each piece, he says, contains a cheeky message. “I want them to start thinking.”



Verbicky’s work has found a market with a number of celebrities in the U.S., including television personality Dr. Phil, designer Calvin Klein, supermodel Lara Stone and actors Cameron Mathison (*All My Children*), Jon Cryer (*Two and A Half Men*) and Jane Kaczmarek (*Malcolm In the Middle*). He also gained recognition in Europe when, in 2008, he was selected by the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts to be part of a juried exhibition at the Louvre in Paris, where one of his works was on display for a month.

The artist described that opportunity at the world-renowned gallery as a “once in a lifetime” experience that has left him with one regret: He sold the piece that was on display at the Louvre. “I should have kept it because it was stamped ‘From the Louvre,’ so it was priceless,” he says. 



An Edmonton native who spent his teenage years in Victoria and then Vancouver, Verbicky always knew he was an artist, but he struggled to establish himself in his career. He moved to the United States in 2000. “I started out so small; my studio was so small,” he says. Back then, he worked on unstretched canvases because he could roll them up.

But being in the U.S. without a green card added extra pressure. He could not take on odd jobs to support himself. This meant that he had to prevail as an artist. “I was put in a position where I had no choice but to succeed.”

The situation had its obstacles, but the hurdles also served as opportunities. In his quest to obtain a green card, he met a few key people, including a lawyer who petitioned for his green card based on his talent. This process required that he solicit the support of several gallery owners who would write letters attesting to his contribution to the art scene. This, in turn, helped him make connections to get his work seen.



Today, Verbicky’s success can be measured in several ways. It’s not all financial, although he admits he makes a comfortable living. “I know I’m successful as an artist, and I look at it from who is collecting me now,” he says.

He did an exhibition last summer in Sun Valley, Idaho, that coincided with a big tech conference in the same town. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the King of Jordan as well as many titans of the tech industry saw his work. “Josh James came into the show and started pointing – ‘I will take that. I will take that,’” Verbicky says, explaining how the tech billionaire who founded firms including Omniture and Domo, bought several of his pieces.

He likes that a growing list of high-profile people understand what he is doing and trying to say.

Many of his works deal with influence. He mocks plagiarism. He calls out those he refers to as ‘sheeple,’ people who follow without questioning why. “I always thought of my work as branding warfare,” he says. ☛





James Verbicky's art is being exhibited at the Kostuik Gallery, 1070 Homer St., Vancouver.  
For information: 604-737-3969, [www.kostuikgallery.com](http://www.kostuikgallery.com)

