

Artist chooses unusual canvas



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

*Leaves of
peepal tree
preferred medium*

BY MELISSA YUE

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To most of us, a leaf is a piece of nature noticed in the fall when it turns in to a nuisance to be raked and discarded.

But for Kailash Bagla of Maple, a leaf means much more.

Mr. Bagla, 55, has turned leaves into artwork by painting portraits and landscapes on them.

"I got the idea from one of my teachers in high school when I was in India," he said.

'I enjoy painting and like to spend time on it. My kind of art is totally different — I've never seen it anywhere in the world — and it's a special thing.'

"He came to my house to teach me fine arts. I saw him painting the portrait on the leaf and I said, 'Somebody else can do it, so why can't I?' I tried it and showed him the next day and he said, 'Kailash, you have God-gifted art because you never learned these things and you can do it.'

Mr. Bagla moved to Canada 31 years ago and worked as a plant manager and quality control manager, but the teacher's compliment always stayed in his mind.

He enrolled as a student at the Ontario College of Art and Design for three years but had to leave because he couldn't afford it.

In December, his son encouraged him to paint a portrait of Santa Claus.

"I touched the paintbrush for the first time after 26 years," he said. "When I start-

ed doing it, I forgot everything about this world."

He brought 60 to 80 leaves from a special tree in India called the peepal tree. The leaves are five inches wide to seven to eight inches long.

Mr. Bagla said the leaves are put in warm water and mixed with chemicals to remove the chlorophyll. After 15 to 20 days, the leaf is removed and becomes transparent.

"I have a 30-year-old painting of my wife and it's framed and nothing has gone wrong with it. So I know these leaves last forever," he said.

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Recently, Mr. Bagla completed a portrait of the Pope for World Youth Day and said people didn't believe he painted it by hand.

"I wanted to give it to him, but there were millions of people here and it was difficult to see him," he said.

"When Pierre Trudeau got married in the early 1970s, his wedding picture came on Time magazine," he said.

"I was at the Ontario College of Art at the time and painted those two portraits on one leaf and everybody loved it and my professor suggested I go to Ottawa to give it to Mr. Trudeau.

"I went to Parliament, but he was out of town at the time. I sent it to him by registered mail and two to three weeks later, I got a letter from him because he received it and really, really appreciated it."

Mr. Bagla hopes to start selling his works as soon as he has the time.

He said the price could start from thousands of dollars and up.

"I enjoy painting and like to spend time on it," he said. "My kind of art is totally different — I've never seen it anywhere in the world — and it's a special thing."