

Artist lets viewers see the world through his eyes

By JULIA LE
Staff

Trung Tran is living proof that you are more than your limitations.

Although the 57-year-old Mississauga man has never developed the ability to speak clearly and cannot adequately express his desires because of an intellectual disability, he's discovered a way to communicate his thoughts and feelings through art.

Through painting, Tran has transcended the limitations of his disability.

A few of his works are on display at the Living Art Centre. A wall on the second floor has been dedicated to his exhibit called *The World Through My Eyes*.

Family and friends gathered last night to celebrate Tran and the obstacles he's overcome at the opening reception of the exhibit that will remain on display semi-permanently.

His younger brother Cuong Tran explained how despite a lifetime of struggles, Tran has always worn a warm smile on his face and accepted everyone with a friendly handshake.

In 1975, during the Vietnam War, his family was divided into two. Tran, his mother and his younger brother Cuong were left behind in Nha Trang, Vietnam while his brother and father went to Canada to join his other brother who was living in Montreal, Quebec.

Cuong said his brother struggled

with no social support under the new harsh regime in place after the war ended.

The family applied for the family to be reunited in 1979, but Tran was rejected because the Canadian embassy would not allow a Canadian entry permit to an unskilled person with many health issues.

His family fought for three years, writing letters to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland for help, obtaining the required medical documents attesting to Tran's good physical health condition.

In June of 1982, Tran was finally given the green light to come to

Canada. But his struggle didn't end there. Over the years, he's had a number of health issues. He battled cancer in 1991 and now has terminal lung cancer. He's been told he likely only has a month or two left to live.

Cuong, a radiologist at Credit Valley Hospital, says his brother

continued to paint through radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

"He always reminds me that life is tough, but his life is tougher so we shouldn't take it for granted," he said. "We need to take it easy and enjoy life."

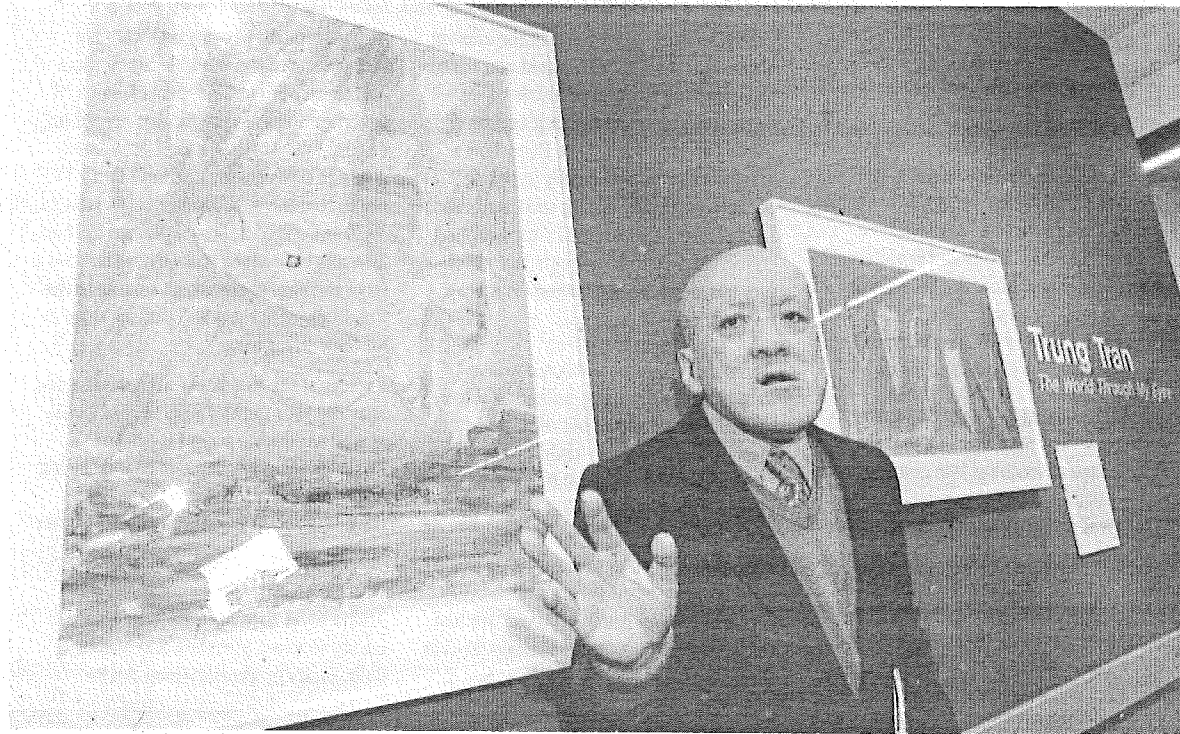
He says his family is thankful that his brother has received such wonderful support from Community Living Mississauga.

Cuong says thanks to the support agency—which connected Tran to Bev Tang-Kong, an artist and educator who offers classes at Imagemaker Art Studio in Port Credit — he's discovered a new avenue of self-expression that enabled him to share his inner self with the world around him.

"Trung has been given a remarkable gift despite his inability to communicate verbally in the same way the rest of us do," says Cole Swanson, the Living Arts Centre's Exhibition Curator. "He's discovered painting as a mechanism for communication that is so unabashed and so passionate that it's truly, truly inspiring."

Swanson added he admires Tran's use of intense colour to walk the line between representation and abstract expression in his paintings.

A book is also being sold to honour Tran and more than 150 paintings he's created over the years. *This is Who I Am: A Celebration of Trung Tran — The Artist* being sold for \$30. For more information, visit bevtangkong.com.



Works by Mississauga artist Trung Tran were unveiled for display last night at the Living Arts Centre.

Staff photo by Rob Beintema