

Paintings capture haunting emptiness

Acrylic images evoke being alone in the city

KEVIN GRIFFIN

In the early days of COVID-19, artist David Wilson couldn't go into his studio to work.

He thought returning to his brushes and paint seemed self-indulgent during a pandemic.

"For about six weeks, I just stopped working and didn't come down to the studio," he said. "I was watching TV and seeing what was happening in Italy and New York. The world was on fire. I couldn't paint."

He was also feeling the impact of the pandemic at home. His wife, the well-known publicist Marnie Wilson, and his daughter Jessica both live with chronic illnesses that make them vulnerable to COVID-19. Marnie has Addison's disease, a rare and serious adrenal gland disorder, and Jessica, Type 1 diabetes.

"Because of COVID, I wasn't interested in going out," Wilson said.

"I didn't go downtown or anywhere really — other than food and groceries and maybe a walk down the street or in a park."

Eventually, he realized he had to get back to making a living.

One thing that was on his mind during the pandemic was how to create a visual record of what he was experiencing. His process includes taking photographs of the subject matter he's interested in, putting them through different programs and manipulating them into a composition he wants to use for a painting.

He estimates he has taken about 30,000 photographs.

"What is it I want to do this time?" he asked himself at the time. "I'll look at the past and go into my archive."

The acrylic on canvas paintings he's created are haunting images of urban landmarks and streets.

They include paintings of rain-swept city streets and sidewalks at night populated by single figures or by figures that blend into their surroundings.

I look at them and feel what it's like being alone amid the bright, shiny lights of the city.

Feels Like Only Yesterday is dominated by the neon lights of Granville Mall reflecting off wet pavement beneath a dark, featureless sky. On the street, there are only a couple of buses; on the sidewalks, a few barely visible pedestrians with umbrellas. In Late Show, only cars are on the street in Dunbar. In Dreams of Distant Memories, a single pedestrian in the foreground stands in front of the Stanley Theatre.

Wilson likes rainy streets because it allows him to create semi-abstract paintings. "When it's raining, especially at night, the light sort of bounces back," he said.

On the wet pavement, reflected light creates distorted mirror images.

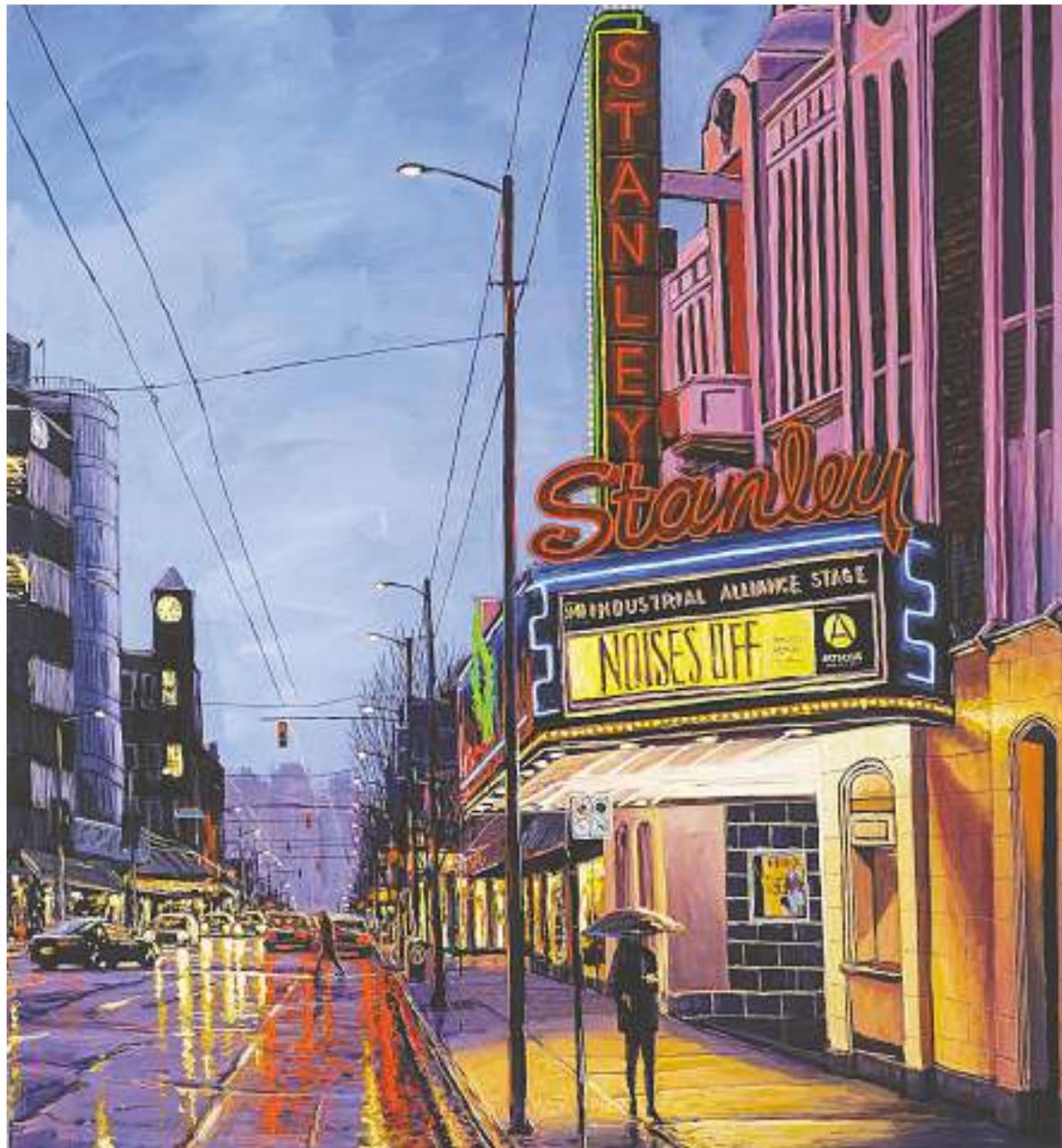
"I like that looseness that comes with painting rainy streets," he said.

When he was painting the current group of works Wilson was thinking both of the uncertain future and our shared past.

"I really enjoy doing what I do," he said. "It's a gift everyday to come into my studio and create something that someone will buy."

Wilson's exhibition Close to Home is from Oct. 1 to 22 at Kurbatoff Gallery on South Granville. Because of the pandemic there will be no exhibition opening.

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Dreams of Distant Memories, acrylic on canvas, is included in David Wilson's exhibit Close to Home, from Oct. 1 to 22 at the Kurbatoff Gallery on South Granville.



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Been there ... done that

Scriptwriter's Utopia brings all too familiar sheen to a conspiracy thriller

CAROLINE FRAMKE

LOS ANGELES — In Gillian Flynn's Utopia, the conspiracy theorists are the ones living in reality.

Thrillers have long gone to the story well of the truth hiding in plain sight, but Amazon Prime's Utopia makes it plainer still. After a disturbing comic called Dystopia appeared to anticipate several devastating pandemics, from SARS to Ebola and back again, a sequel called Utopia surfaces with the promise of predicting the catastrophic future, sparking

an urgent hunt as a dangerous new flu spreads across the country.

With time running out, a group of rabid fans (Desmin Borges, Jessica Rothe, Dan Byrd, Ashleigh LaThrop and Javon (Wanna) Walton), a shadowy network called The Harvest, a possibly mad scientist (John Cusack) and the heroine of the comic herself (Sasha Lane) all end up racing to find and decode its pages.

In Utopia, all governments and corporations are suspect; the only person you can trust is yourself, and even then, it's a leap of faith.

UTOPIA

Where: Amazon Prime

The season consists of eight energetic, propulsive episodes (seven of which I've seen), each unfolding like a chapter of an addictive crime novel.

But for a show that's essentially a series of puzzle boxes, its mysteries are all too easy to solve.

Still, the crowded, overlapping narratives still give the actors some room to play. Utopia teeters on the edge of conspiracy thriller and pure comic book energy without ever fully committing to either.

Utopia ends up feeling like a decently entertaining version of stories that have been told before.