

## Saskatchewan muralist defies death with art meant to stand the test of time

*Artist Michael Gaudet says he doesn't know if dialysis will keep him alive long enough for transplant.*

Janani Whitfield · [CBC News · Posted: Nov 18, 2018 8:30 AM CT](#) | Last Updated: November 18, 2018

For Michael Gaudet, painting is as vital as the dialysis that has kept him alive for the last four years. "Painting, and creativity in general, is really good for the soul — it helps feed your soul," said Gaudet, a 60-year-old muralist who hails from Manitou Beach. He knows there's no guarantee the dialysis will keep him alive long enough to receive a kidney transplant from a potential donor.

He is inspired by his artistic heroes, like Michelangelo and Diego Rivera, to keep painting the brilliant murals that grace towns and cities across Saskatchewan. "Now they're long gone but their work lives on," he said.

Gaudet began painting murals as a teenager in Toronto, after he was diagnosed with chronic end-stage renal failure. "I decided, since I was kind of faced with a near-death experience at the young age of 19, that I wanted to leave my mark in the world," he said. He ended up painting a visual prayer, a silent wish for the gift of life. It showed a patient slowly getting up from a bed to walking with crutches to striding off the canvas. It turned out to be prophetic. Gaudet received a life-saving transplant from his brother that kept him in "glorious health" for the next 34 years.

Since then he has kept busy painting murals across Western Canada, with some featuring multiple images that flow from the beginning of a town's history to present-day. "I guess it's like an embrace of the larger community that has come and gone over the years, and families."



*(Michael Gaudet/Web gallery)*

He also tackled a project he calls his "high watermark," a massive mural measuring nearly 14 metres by 11 metres on display at the [Sacred Heart Chaldean Catholic Church](#) in Saskatoon. This mural was finished with the help of his daughter and mural-painting accomplice Ilara Stefaniuk-Gaudet. "It really is breath-taking," he said.

Gaudet had a health setback in May 2014. His kidney function had deteriorated so badly that he was at risk of a spontaneous bleed at any moment, with a subsequent risk of a stroke or heart attack. Dialysis has given him the hope that he may live long enough to get a transplant, but he's not simply waiting around for a donor.

He's collaborating on a centennial project for his hometown of Manitou Beach, which will include murals and a giant steel structure, dipped in nickel, that will literally reflect the world around it.

Gaudet will keep painting, finding the healing within it, for however long he has left. "We only have so many years and I just don't want to go down without a fight."

With files from [CBC Saskatchewan Weekend](#)