

20 Questions with Wyland and Mike Veitch

Wyland, to most the name is synonymous with aquatic paintings. However, a one dimensional man he is not. Wyland Foundation, The Cousteau Society, Wyland Ocean Challenge, the Scripps Institute; these are a few of the environmental foundations and charities he is involved with. From humble beginnings as a struggling painter to the world renowned artist he is today, Wyland strives to spread the message of environmental awareness.

Right, first things first. What's with the single name?

Less is more. I like my family name and want to make it a name of honour.

What about your first few murals, are they signed with only the name Wyland?

Every mural since college is signed Wyland

In your wildest dreams did you ever think your murals would become the huge success they are today?

I always had a great confidence



in myself. I saw it building with the environmental movement. As environmental awareness grew, I knew appreciation for my artwork would also grow.

Nowadays demand for your murals is huge, how difficult was it to gain permission for your first "Whale Wall"?

Very difficult. It took three years in which time I almost gave up. But I am glad I didn't, I now have 89 walls in eight countries. I am in demand in 70 more countries but I am very careful about my selection process. I have a goal of 100 walls before I move on to other projects. No one thought I was serious when I said I would do 100 but I have accomplished everything I set out to do.

What ever gave you the idea to paint



such massive works of art?

I wanted to create lifesize creations so I needed a larger canvas.

You are also known as a big environmental activist, do you have your own foundation and/or do you contribute to other environmental causes?

We have passed the tenth anniversary of the Wyland Foundation. I have also started a non-profit organization with the Scripps Institute called the Wyland Ocean Challenge-Clean Water for the 21st Century and Beyond. Also, I have supported over 100 foundations over the last 20 years. Recently, I was asked to become a member of the board for the Cousteau Society.

What does that entail?

We are preparing to rediscover the destinations Jacques Cousteau visited. We study the films and compare what each location looks like today, chart all the changes since his time. I will also become a mentor for Pierre Yves Cousteau. We will continue in the footsteps of Jacques and continue his vision for the world's oceans. We are also starting the Wyland/Cousteau Cleanup Campaign, a five year program to clean the world's oceans. We will start on the east coast, then to the west, the third year will be the Great Lakes, fourth year encompasses the entire U.S., and the fifth year we take it international. We really want to cleanup the coasts and waterways, our motto is: "A million people will make a difference".

Who are your heroes?

Jacques Cousteau is my hero. His wisdom was so important and continues to be so today. He inspired my creation of a foundation for



environmental work

You are currently working on a project called "Clean Water for the 21st Century" that teaches children about the ocean, can you explain a little about it

Next year we will launch the curriculum to 60 million students across the U.S., from Kindergarten to 12th grade. It will be available to each and every school! There are four levels, each available free through the internet. We will be conducting another nationwide tour at schools and aquariums with special guests such as Dr. Sylvia Earle and Dr. Robert Ballard. The following year we will launch the program worldwide through the United Nations.

How many "whale walls" have you painted now?
89 walls in eight different countries.

Have you ever backed up from a wall and noticed that a whale's head is 4 times larger than its body?

Well, that used to happen when I was first starting out. Now I have a feeling for it, you can't fake it, it's a natural feeling.

You paint all your walls in a freehand style, others project images onto a wall and then paint over it, do you just laugh at these others or do you feel like smacking them for degrading a

natural talent?

I have a sense of perspective in my mind's eye, do the background first, it is a mass of colour coming into sharp focus, like a Polaroid. Then I step away and look at it. Then it is onto the animals and the final details. The giant murals take a week or less, when you work for free you learn to work fast!

A lot of your work is done suspended at great height, any near death experiences?

We have had scaffolding break and numerous close calls.

You have been diving all over the world, have you seen anything that filled you with so much inspiration that you had to get out of the water and draw it? You know something like whales mating, dolphins giving birth, shark ripping off an arm etc etc.

I have been diving for over 20 years visiting all the premier spots and have never had a bad dive, well maybe Boston Harbour. My favourite places would have to be Papua New Guinea, it has everything from pygmy sea horses to mantas, dolphins, and whale sharks. Also Fiji for the colours of the soft corals, some of the best photos I have taken are from Fiji.

Speaking of photos, you are known as a painter, what's with all these cameras?

I am building an image bank for a new fine art photo limited edition. I will be collaborating photos and paintings into one piece of art called Underwater Photography Painting, these will be available to collectors. It will be on canvas through something called the Giclee process.



Your marketing skills are legendary, what is the key to your success?

Using both sides of my brain. Artists work from the right, balance is the key to success.

You have a reputation as a hard driving perfectionist who is a bit hard on his crew, no sniveling and all that, is that true? You push the idea of Team Wyland. What does that encompass?

Is that true? Where did you get that?! It's all about good leadership, I know what I want to do and how to do it. If you snivel you are gone, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Pressure does make diamonds. I am very serious about my work, as an artist all I have is integrity, once that is gone you have nothing. Everything has to be done the

Wyland way or we don't do it. Team Wyland is all about tenacity and a hard drive to get the job done. Team Wyland is a group of dedicated volunteers with the same vision: to inspire people to have a positive impact on the planet. We are small but mighty! Everything is very team oriented we think big but are still focused on the end result. We have fun with no bureaucracy, everyone is involved 100%

You are mainly known as a painter, what other art mediums do you work with?

Actually, sculpture is my strongest medium, I am working on a series of bronzes. That will be my next 30 year project, 100 monumental life-size bronzes.



You have a reputation as a partier and a bit of a ladykiller, do you hang out with rock stars and party till dawn?

Not true! I rarely drink at all. I do throw some good parties though, I consider myself the designated instigator.

Do you get groupies? Are they normal girls or a bunch of dolphin hugging hairy hippie types?

Ah, the Wylandettes! They range all the way up to 90! Cradle to the grave man.

I understand you drive a BMW bike?

What?! Hell no, I'm a Harley man. I own four Harleys and I just

bought an Indian Chief. I love riding, I do it every day, its my favourite thing.

Mike Veitch

www.bigblueimages.com

Check out Wyland.com for more information on Wyland and what he is up to. Wyland.com is a fully functional site with virtual galleries and you can even volunteer to work on a Whaling Wall!

www.wyland.com



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