

Asian market beckons Richmond Hill artist

Adam Mc Lean

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With a sketchbook in hand, Andrew Mok has taken his talent across the Pacific Ocean and hopes to draw up jobs in Beijing, China.

Having graduated from Sheridan College's visual and creative arts program, the 25-year-old has spent the past year freelancing his caricature work, often hired to capture moments from weddings or graduations.

Hoping to nurture his passion that often leads him to public places, where he will sit for hours

at a time and sketch those who pass in and out of his multi-paged world, the Richmond Hill resident has spent the past few months travelling and searching for freelance work in China.

While accompanying his girlfriend who started a radio job in the Chinese capital, Mr. Mok said he wanted to broaden his business landscape and try his hand at editorial and magazine illustration to complement his time and place work.

Figuring months spent in Beijing may lead to some fulfilling networking opportunities, as well as insight into the illustration industry in Asia, Mr. Mok is dipping his pen into the foreign market ink, which thus far has provided some intriguing opportunities.

It has been a roundabout journey for the one-time McMaster computer engineering student turned computer science student turned life sciences student turned artist.

But his persistence has paid off. His work has appeared in Time Out Beijing, and word of mouth regarding his work grows.

He responded this week via e-mail to some questions about his experiences in Beijing

Q: Had you ever been to China before? What is it like to go from living in Richmond Hill to Beijing?



Richmond Hill resident Andrew Mok shows one of his creations in a Beijing cafe. The Sheridan College grad has decided to get back to his roots as inspiration for his work by moving to the Chinese capital.

A: I have been to Hong Kong once, but never Beijing. It can get difficult as my Mandarin skills are not the best, though I do speak Cantonese which is similar. This is especially true when trying to do simple things such as order food or ask for directions. The city is also very large and its sheer size can be overwhelming. Aside from that, I find that I am adapting quite well.

Q: Tell me more about what you are doing with Time Out Beijing and how you were hired with them?

A: Before leaving for Beijing, I thought it would be a good idea to contact companies and studios ahead of time: animation studios, magazines, and newspapers which I had researched online. I was not expecting too many replies due to the language barrier, but Time Out Beijing was one of the few respondents. I met with the art editor and chief editor upon my arrival, and they appeared to really enjoy my work. They said that if any freelance work comes up they would contact me. The next day the editor e-mailed me with an article that he needed artwork for. Since then, I have been providing work for them on a monthly basis.

Q: What is the art business scene like in Beijing?

A: The art scene is quite interesting. They have a district here full of galleries of contemporary modern art, art stores, and cafés. I find the people and the culture here inspires many great characters for me to sketch, which is perfect for practising. As far as caricature work is concerned, I notice that it is not as popular here as it is in North America, which impacts that aspect of my commissioned work. However, I still receive e-mails from clients in Toronto and have even managed to commission work while abroad via e-mail and PayPal.

Q: Could you one day see yourself staying in Beijing permanently?

A: As far as living in Beijing permanently, that question is still up in the air. I would like to stay for a year or two if the opportunity arises, however, I would definitely also like to explore the North American market in the near future.

Q: What does the latest art for the Time Out column represent? What is it called?

A: The latest piece for Time Out's July issue is for a column they have called She Says, He Says.

The column features readers writing to the magazine usually with dilemmas concerning their romantic life. This month, the artwork describes a reader who keeps falling in love with the wrong man.

Some of the feedback she receives from the magazine suggests that she make a list to ensure that her potential mate meets her requirements.

Q: Have you landed any other jobs out there?

A: I had the opportunity to freelance with another magazine, however, they requested that I work for them exclusively, but as a freelancer.

This would mean that I could not work with Time Out or any other competition anymore. I felt it would be unwise to end my partnership with Time Out prematurely. I still extended an offer to work with the new mag if they ever change their mind.

Q: What is your plan if or when you come home?

A: I am currently enrolled at Sheridan College for Computer Animation, so I will be there unless something were to come up.

Q: What will be the hardest thing to leave in Beijing? What is the best part of being there?

A: Kelda (girlfriend) will remain in Beijing until next April. So aside from the lower cost of food, hanging out with her is what I will miss the most about Beijing.

Q: What is the worst part of being there?

A: The worst part about being in Beijing is having to be away from my friends and family, my peers and my cat. Also I feel that I learn quicker and am more inspired with peers drawing around me.

Q: What is your typical day like there?

A: Wake up. Coffee with breakfast. E-mail. Look for freelance work. Draw and work on projects. Update blog if I can. Get lost in the city and explore its food. Find a café and sketch. Usually have hotpot for dinner. Relax with my sketchbook in front of my computer or TV. Call it a day.

For more information on Andrew Mok or to see his work visit www.andrewmok.ca