

City artist paints tribute to Cecil

Slain lion becomes powerful symbol

By Aidan Geary

A WINNIPEG artist upset about the killing of Cecil the lion has taken his grief — and his paints — to the streets.

Brian Gasenzer has been painting murals in the city since 2007. Last week, after hearing about the baiting, killing and beheading of a lion in Zimbabwe by an American game hunter, Gasenzer was moved to paint another — this time on his own property.

“(Cecil’s story) made me feel inspired, I guess, because there’s a movement of people waking up to what’s happening,” Gasenzer said Thursday. “Honestly, my heart was just going out to the world... my heart was really going out to this animal.”

Last week, Walter Palmer, a Minnesota dentist, reportedly paid \$50,000 to kill the lion, which had been studied by Oxford University since 2008 and

called Cecil. Palmer’s hunt has been condemned by people across the globe, including celebrities Ricky Gervais and Jimmy Kimmel. Palmer closed his dental practice, reporting threats had been made against him. But Gasenzer, at least, said he’s not angry about Palmer’s hunt.

“I feel compassion, and I feel love,” he said. “(The story is) bringing out beauty in people as well.”

Gasenzer painted a massive colourful portrait of the lion on his garage door in Wolseley using a combination of aerosol spray paint — he said he loves the bright colours — and smooth acrylic brush work. In the portrait, Cecil appears looking at the viewer in electric blues and pinks.

“I feel like memorial art should be happy,” Gasenzer said. “I used pinks and I used purples and bright turquoise and things like that because I wanted it to be inspiring to people rather than depressing. I wanted them to see the bright side.”

To Gasenzer, that bright side is the awareness of poaching and animal rights that has come with the widespread media coverage of Cecil’s killing.

“All the awareness that’s spread is amazing,” Gasenzer said. “You hear about animal poaching, but it’s never this direct issue in public space. Because it was this lion, it was this big symbol, and we’re not used to seeing that happen, at least in Canada.”

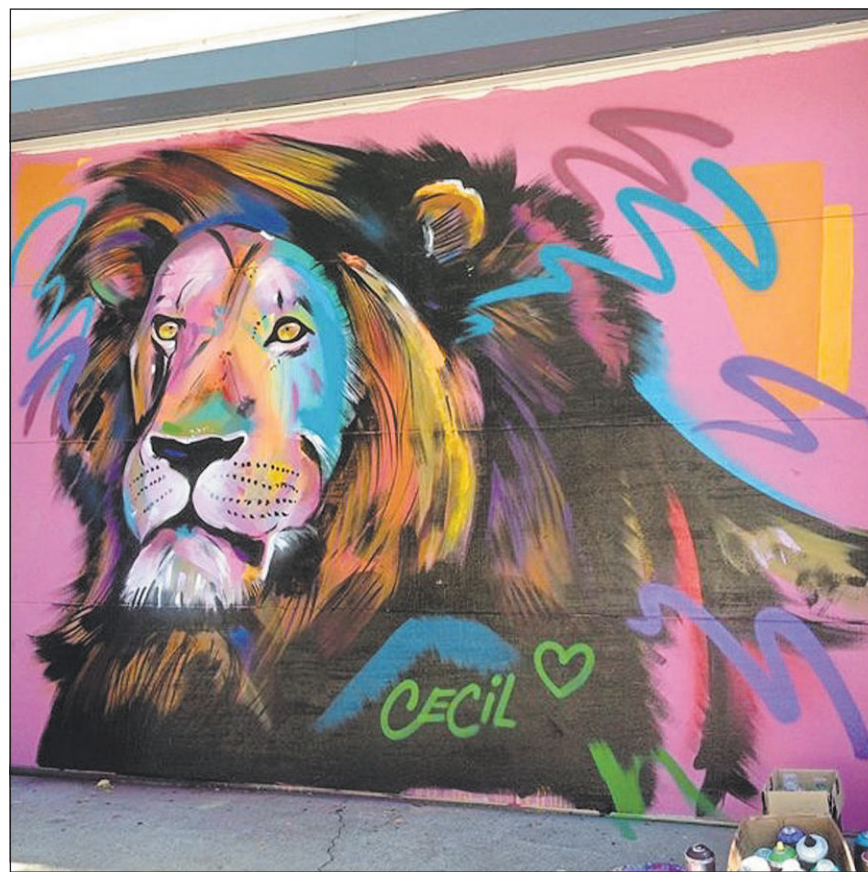
At least some of Gasenzer’s neighbours said they appreciate seeing his work in their community.

Linda McLaren has lived in Wolseley for more than 50 years, and said the penchant to bring colour and individuality to the neighbourhood is part of the reason she loves living there. An artist herself, McLaren said she thought Gasenzer’s painting is “beautiful.”

Gasenzer said most of the response so far has been positive. He said he chose the public canvas as a way to give something back to his community.

“I just wanted people to see it,” he said. “If there’s anything that I can really say, I want people to know that it just comes from the heart.”

Gasenzer’s animal art will be featured in Nuit Blanche on Sept. 26 at 88 Albert St.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A mural of Cecil the lion in Wolseley is well-received by neighbours.

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