

## Famed artist in fight of his life

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For local painter Steven Csorba, next week's show and sale of his art might be the most personal and important event of his career. Csorba, 41, has built an international reputation for his depictions of sport. He's done paintings of Wayne Gretzky and Muhammad Ali. The Oilers have commissioned him to do work. In 1991, Notre Dame University in Indiana hired him to do 20 images depicting the Fighting Irish's storied football history.

But Csorba readily admits the invite-only show at his Edmonton home on Aug. 27 and 28 will be very different from anything he's ever done before. For sale will be 60 paintings he produced while in excruciating pain in the 18 months following cancer surgery on his jaw and neck.

The paintings, he says, "are all more on the healing side, as opposed to 'Look at me, I'm suffering.' They're very bold, colourful, almost childlike in their energy." Creating them, Csorba explains, "really was medicine to me. When I was immersed in painting, I didn't feel any pain. I really wasn't aware of it."

He will also launch his website, [www.stevenscorba.com](http://www.stevenscorba.com), on Aug. 27, where the general public can see the work. Csorba's life could easily have gone into a tailspin in 2003, when, at the age of 39, he was diagnosed with cancer. An athlete and lifelong non-smoker, the news that he had a large tumour growing in his throat and another on his jaw was nearly incomprehensible.

He underwent an operation known as a bilateral mandibular swing, which he describes as having a surgeon saw through his jaw and down into his neck, peel his face off like Yul Brynner in *Westworld* and rebuild his throat with tissue taken from his arm. The operation took 14 hours and was followed by seven weeks of radiation therapy, which ended up causing permanent damage. The radiation killed his salivary glands, which in turn has caused his teeth to rapidly deteriorate and has even had an effect on his jawbone.

"I can't produce my own saliva anymore," he says. "I have to continually drink water. I don't get much sleep because I have to keep getting up and drinking water through the night. And my teeth are literally killing the jaw." On Sept. 1, Csorba will go under the surgeon's knife again to remove all his teeth and reconstruct his damaged jaw. Eventually, he hopes to have prosthetic teeth implanted.

"I can't have regular dentures because I don't produce saliva," he explains. But he also knows this next round will lay him up for many months. "I won't be able to talk or do much else," he says. "I call it Back To Hell Round Two." That's where the art sale comes in. Csorba is trying to raise enough money on which to live in the coming months because he'll be unable to work. Prior to being diagnosed with cancer, he owned a successful communications and marketing company, but lost it while he recovered from surgery.

Csorba has always been extremely active in the community. The father of three coaches and plays soccer and even created a development program for promising young players. He's helping some local Rotary clubs raise \$50,000 through the sale of prints entitled "Inner Peace" that he created to commemorate the organization's 100th anniversary.

And now he works with other cancer patients, helping them discover the therapeutic benefits of art. Staring death in the face has changed Csorba's life, helping him appreciate every moment he spends on Earth, and he hopes that through his paintings he can help others treasure the precious gift we've all been given.

"I know it's a tired cliché, but I wake up every day now full of appreciation. I've learned to accept things," he says. "Everything fits together the way it's supposed to happen."

