

# ARTS

## Million-dollar pairing

Barenaked Ladies, National Arts Centre Orchestra unite, F4

## Beyoncé does it her way

Singer announces album and releases it on same day, F6



## The Cappies — Show No. 6

St. Paul's Catholic High School stages The Eyes of Heaven, F3

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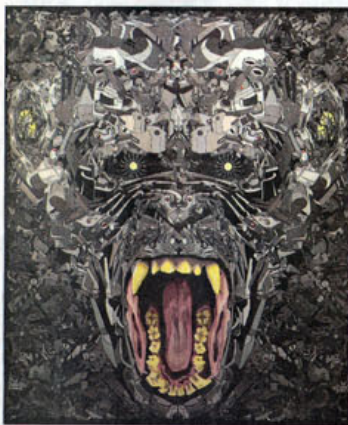
THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION F

# ART IN THE

Eric Sze-Lang Chan a.k.a. eepmon created this fanciful design for a limited edition of a parka sold by Canada Goose.



# DIGITAL AGE



The artist eepmon on To See, To Hear, To Speak I (above): (The) series is the antithesis to the proverbial principle to "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil." Where there is light, there is dark. Where there is love, there is hate. A reminder that we should not turn a blind eye but instead be aware with all of our senses.

### Computers are the tool eepmon uses to create artwork used in everything from video games to parkas

**JULIE BEUN**  
OTTAWA CITIZEN

**A**s a kid growing up in Cumberland, east of Ottawa, in the '80s, the digital artist known as eepmon wasn't the cool kid. It's not that he wasn't funny, smart or talented. He was all that — and then some. It's just that he lacked the one thing that would ensure lasting popularity with his buddies in school: a good Internet connection.

It's ironic, now, considering that eepmon, or Eric Sze-Lang Chan (according to his dad and mum) has made an international name for himself in everything from fashion and fine art to video games, based entirely on the magic he weaves with computers.

"Whoever had the best Internet connection was also the most popular kid when I was growing up," he laughs. "I was still on dial-up."

Well, he's up to speed now. These days, the 33-year-old splits his time between his base in Brooklyn, N.Y. and Toronto, Ottawa and Tokyo. He's designed artwork for Microsoft Xbox 360, Mini Cooper and an Apple iOS game, Hidden Galaxies, developed by Ottawa-based game publisher Magmic.

His work has been acquired by

the Canada Council Art Bank, been shown at the Guggenheim Museum and can be seen on 26 street-light posts (a collaboration with Lynda Cronin) on Hazeldean Road between Kanata and Stittsville. And in January, he'll appear in the CBC's latest series, Four Rooms, which pits four leading art and antique dealers against each other.

Anything else?

Oh yeah. He taught design at Algonquin College just six years after graduating and currently counts multimillionaire Dani Reiss — of the iconic Canada Goose company — among his many friends.

In fact, it was that friendship that has led to Chan's most recent collaboration, a wildly colourful and intricate design for the lining of 150 limited-edition Canada Goose parkas that will sell for a sweet \$950-\$1,200 Cdn at just 15 premium retailers worldwide, and only one Canadian outlet, NRML on Rideau Street. (GQ France recently nominated it to their 'Top 40 winter coats list.)

Already an admirer and collector of Chan's art, Reiss agreed to collaborate with the artist when they met back in 2009. Recalls Chan: "I said, 'listen, I really believe in you, what you're doing."

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## Searching for the soul of Elvis

Quebec impersonator's show transports fans to Vegas, 1972

**TONY LOFARO**  
OTTAWA CITIZEN

**J**ust when Quebec singer Martin Fontaine thought he was over playing Elvis Presley, audiences pulled him back in.

The Laval native has made a career out of impersonating Elvis, performing in the show *Elvis Story* more than 1,500 times in Canada, the U.S. and several countries around the world. He began performing the show in 1995 at Le Capitole Theatre in Quebec City, where it was a constant sellout, and brought it to the Casino du Lac Leamy in 2002.

But Fontaine took a break from impersonating Elvis in 2006 to do *Showman*, his rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues soul revue. He released an album and worked on other projects. He said he needed a new challenge and was tired of doing the same Elvis songs and stories.

"But as I was touring all over Quebec I always got the vibes that people were missing my role as Elvis. So, I said, if ever I do it again, I should do it in a different way," said Fontaine, 49, who brings his new show, *The Elvis Experience*, to the Casino du Lac Leamy this weekend.

While the *Elvis Story* show covered the singer's entire career, starting with his early days with Sun Records, *Elvis Experience* concentrates on Elvis's appearances in Las Vegas at the International Hotel from the late '60s to the early '70s.

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**Martin Fontaine says he works hard to create 'a feeling, an illusion of being at an Elvis show.**

### The Elvis Experience

**What:** Singer Martin Fontaine recreates Elvis's shows at the International Hotel in Las Vegas, backed by 24 musicians and eight singers.

**When & Where:** Theatre at Casino du Lac Leamy, Dec. 14 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m., Dec. 15 at 4 p.m. The show returns to the casino Feb. 5-9, 2014.

**Tickets:** Start at \$79.50. The show is sold out for December performances, although good seats available for February shows. Reservations 1-877-977-7970 or [www.ticketmaster.ca](http://www.ticketmaster.ca)

## ARTS



Artist eepmon says this piece, *Across Distant Waters* (2009), was part of a series exploring his identity as a Chinese-Canadian: 'The monkeys are a representation of myself moving between the ocean connecting to the far East, right, with the ornate motifs, left, representing the West.'



PHOTOS: ERIC CHAN

He was raised in Cumberland, but these days eepmon, a.k.a. Eric Sze-Lang Chan, splits his time between a home base in Brooklyn, and Ottawa, Toronto and Tokyo.

tion. Technology. Creativity conference's Flash award in Toronto, he graduated from Carleton in 2008 and "went full steam ahead. I got gigs and more gigs internationally."

These days, Chan's creativity seems boundless. When working on a project, he gets up early — around 4 a.m. — to create art, using his photographs, paintings and drawings and "collaborating" with a computer program that allows for spontaneous creativity. Once an image is finished, it can be printed onto a multitude of media, or uploaded.

Yet as much as he relishes computers — "it's just a tool, a paintbrush," he says — there are drawbacks to the digital age in which anyone can claim almost anything online or in a blog, and it's accepted without much critical thought.

"We're in the primal stage of the digital age, where it's all about immediacy. There's quantity out there, but a lack of quality. Anyone can pick up a tablet and mouse and call themselves a graphic designer. People can declare themselves to be something without legitimacy; people take it on because of the immediacy.

"There are a lot of people with big talk, but you have to execute, you have to put in the extra mile and believe in it. I have to be serious about my craft, know the tools, the machine inside and out and be 100 per cent with it."

So far, that approach seems to be working, as he continues to dream bigger, better and brighter. "For me, it would be an honour to be an ambassador for Canada in the digital creative space," he says. "I want to contribute to Ottawa's success. And I want eepmon to be internationally known and to work with the brightest and most talented people around."

## Art: 'He's just about to take off'

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"You're a Canadian company, made in Canada and the details you go into ... I'm the same way, but in the digital world."

Two years later, over lunch in New York, Chan showed Reiss stunning artwork he'd developed for the parka. From there, says Spencer Orr, Canada Goose's vice-president of design and merchandising, it was a matter of figuring out how to print the design, which features nine Canada geese, a maple leaf, a monkey and tempura shrimp, onto the lining. "We've learned so much about digital printing and dyeing," he remarks. "Eric was really a unique opportunity. His art is intricate and the way he puts it together, the computer science behind it, just blows me away."

He's not alone. "He's always evolving and doing something different and new, above and beyond. Yet he's very down to earth and has no ego. Whenever we spend time together, I feel like I'm on this journey with him," says John Criswick, who owns,

### Three things that inspire eepmon

1. Takashi Murakami: Considered the "Warhol of Japan," Murakami is perhaps the most internationally prolific living Japanese artist, and exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada's 2009 Pop Art exhibit. Like eepmon, Murakami's art exists everywhere digital art can go: in fine art, animation, sculpture and fashion. "He was the one who really gave a voice to what Japanese culture and esthetics

are," Chan says.

2. The Gutai Group: Chan was first exposed to Gutai philosophy by Ming Tiampo, his professor of East Asian studies at Carleton. The radical, post-war movement declared that neither the artist, nor the media, should overpower each other — "the creation of new art is really shaking hands between the artist and the medium," he explains. "Their phil-

osophy was more about the visceral, not the end result."

3. Kevin Chan: Although not an artist, Chan says his older brother, currently deputy secretary-general and secretary-general designate at McGill, is a major influence. Educated at Western and later, Harvard, he says his brother "is always watching me, keeping me in check. I'm proud of him and I look up to him."

among other things, Magmic and the Mercury Lounge in the ByWard Market, where he first hosted a vernissage for Chan 10 years ago. Now, with 40 to 50 pieces in his private collection — eepmon art ranges from \$700 to \$7,000 — Criswick may be the largest collector worldwide. "Where will he go?" he muses. "He could go more commercial. He could design a smart car, architecture, interactive media, film. It seems to me that he's just about to take off."

High talk? Not after the trajectory Chan's been on. After graduating from Canterbury High School's arts program, he took computer science at Algonquin College. It was then, during a Corel co-op placement, that he discovered their user-experience design team. He showed them his "doodles," and by December 2003, he was back as a co-op designer. "That was when I said to myself, 'Eric, don't you ever dare give up on your art.' It was up to me to realize that."

After an unhappy stint as an IT specialist at the Bank of Canada, in 2004 he enrolled at Carleton University's bachelor of information technology, interactive media and design program, and, daydreaming one afternoon, came up with "eepmon" as a "twisted name for ape man. Monkeys are very curious and playful. Life should be like that. So eepmon is a way of living."

After winning "Best Canadian Student" at the annual Future. Innova-