



Postcard From Richmond

Alexander Wolff, Richmond

SI's Alexander Wolff is stationed on the far fringe of the Olympic scene, covering long-track speedskating. He'll be filing regular blog dispatches from the edge.

Yesterday afternoon, after the women's 3,000 meters, I found a place even livelier than the Richmond Curling Club's Big Rock Lounge. The Canadian Sport Centre of Calgary, one of the entities working diligently to clog podiums with Canadian Olympians, held a reception at the University of British Columbia Boathouse overlooking the Fraser River to showcase a dozen portraits it had commissioned of legendary Canadian athletes. The artist, Gordon Milne, spent about three months on each, first probing the Olympian's personality with interviews, then rendering the athlete with bold, angular splotches of color.



Gordon Milne's portrait of Canadian speedskater Gaetan Boucher, a four time Olympic medalist. (www.gordonmilneart.com)

The operative word is splotches. Milne charmed the gathering — and disarmed any incipient art critics in the crowd — with an anecdote from his first year in art school. He had just executed an assignment, a self-portrait, when he was summoned to his professor's office. Teacher looked carefully at student, then carefully at painting, and said, "You don't look like you have syphilis."

A number of Milne's subjects were on hand, including rower Silken Laumann, speedskater Gaetan Boucher, swimmer Alex Baumann and pentathlete Diane Jones Konihowski. As the dinner hour approached, the big screens in the boathouse showed Montreal's Alexandre Bilodeau nailing the moguls run that delivered Canada its first gold medal at an Olympics on home soil. The place went nuts.