



Cancer research scientist and consultant Antoine Abugaber relaxes among his paintings in his Toronto home. Abugaber finds that his two different worlds of art and science complement one another.

Photo by SPIKE LOVE

## Toronto consultant finds balance in art and science

By KAREN BRIDSON

**A**ntoine Abugaber's challenge: to balance the passions of the right side of his brain with the ingenuity of its left half.

It's not a difficult task for someone like Abugaber, but remains remarkably time consuming nonetheless.

As a leading cancer research scientist and consultant, the Toronto resident's specialties are breast cancer and prostate cancer. And in his spare time, he's a critically acclaimed artist, with showings of his impressionist style paintings in England and Toronto.

"I'm a creative person and although I love science, there's something missing in terms of fulfillment on my artistic side,"

said Abugaber.

While he must work his time for painting around his schedule as a consultant, Abugaber says his two worlds don't clash at all and in fact complement one another.

"When I am very creative in terms of painting I actually deliver better results in my cancer research," said Abugaber, who recently celebrated his 43rd birthday.

"After I've been painting I'm more sharp and able to think of better ideas and think of new things that haven't been thought about. I begin thinking outside of the box."

That creative edge helped Abugaber play a role in developing the newest breast cancer drug called Arimidex while working at AstraZeneca, the country's leading

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### NEWS

## Balancing art, science

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cancer research facility. The drug promises breast cancer victims fewer side effects from treatment.

While cancer has touched his family in the same way it has touched most, Abugaber says his inspiration for cancer research came during his training as a molecular biologist at university in Montreal.

"I will always remember this one patient grabbing my arm and saying, 'do you think you can find something to cure me before I die?' and I said, 'I hope to work hard and find something soon,'" he said. "That's why I'm doing it. My reward is what I'm doing for humanity in the end. What's most important is making people feel better, live longer and hopefully finding a cure."

The cousin of film star Omar Sharif, Abugaber was born in Egypt. An only child, he says he inherited his artistic side from his mother and his scientific side from his father.

"On my mother's side, they are all actors and artists," said Abugaber, whose cousin Manuel Tadros is a popular singer and actor in Quebec, set to star in a film with Roger Moore.

Abugaber himself had plans to be an actor, taking the stage for the first time at the ripe old age of three. After moving to Canada at the age of six, he wrote his first plays at high school, which were acted by more than 20 of his classmates.

Having done some modeling, Abugaber said film director Sergio Leoni approached him at the Montreal Film Festival when

he was 20 years old and asked him to act in one of his upcoming films.

"I really wanted to be in it but my parents said that I would have to finish university first," he said.

His passion for photography, which first emerged at the age of eight, kept his artistic spirit alive through his university days, he said.

While working a part-time job in a pharmaceutical company at university, he also had his own professional photography studio.

Abugaber produces about 100 paintings each year, with each fetching between \$1,000 and \$6,000.

One of the paintings he is most proud of was used as the poster to launch the Arimidex breast cancer drug. "It's a painting of a woman with her hand over her face," he said. "It represents the shame and the stigma of breast cancer. It perfectly reflects the situation." The painting was reproduced on 18,000 posters advertising the drug.

Having also spent a great deal of time becoming a pilot, a skydiver and a scuba diver, Abugaber said he is now trying to slow his life down a few notches. He recently embarked on his career as a consultant after leaving AstraZeneca, where he was one of their leading scientists.

Working up to 70 hours per week and traveling the world, the single downtown Toronto resident said he hasn't had much time for himself. And that's something he's working on changing.

Visit Abugaber's website at [www.antoinegaber.com](http://www.antoinegaber.com)

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