The day could not have been more perfect for a visit to John Eaton’s country abode: autumn had dressed the woods in its spectacular cape of gold and red, the smooth volcanic rock of the Canadian Shield glistened in the bright sunlight, the beautiful Laurentians spreading around us as we headed towards Wakefield-Lapêche.

The artist’s property, snuggled in the undulating hills, was also picture-perfect, with a low, pink-roofed house, a large stables and a whitewashed studio constructed of bales of straw. And when one thought things couldn’t get any better, they did, in the shape of Eaton’s muse and pet, a giant white Percheron trotting towards us.

"Watch your feet," Eaton says casually. The hooves are the size of large saucers. But Goya is a gentle giant, nibbling at our sleeves and nuzzling up to us. He would’ve followed us into the studio, but resigned himself to roaming the property around it.

In the light-infused atelier, paintings upon paintings line the walls, taking the breath away with their content and scope.

"I just love nature," says John Eaton. The statement is as simple as it is redundant, for nature clearly reigns in all of his work; it permeates each canvas and guides every brushstroke.

Much of the art is done with oil sticks making it feel more like a drawing than a painting, but in fact, Eaton’s technique and style is uniquely his own. Recently, he has been working on a series of paintings using doors he buys from suppliers of building materials as canvas, creating stunning vertical vistas swirling with upward movement.

In many of the pieces he begins by applying plaster to the board, a heavily textured background that is a work of art in itself, and which will inadvertently guide the paint. Thus created landscapes have a feel of a bas-relief at times, with grooves and folds that add another layer to the visual lexicon.

The imagery is dreamlike, and at times dark. Sleepless nights bring sombre visions, as trees tangle with darkness and lovers float down streams, embracing. Shadows resemble
figures, figures resemble nature. There is quiet drama in these works, a suspended movement, and a touch of melancholy.

*Draft horses in the night* is one such painting. All shifting energy, an invisible force throwing long shadows as a white horse grazes against the darkness. Others hide on the periphery of this dreamy scene, all is quiet, and yet all is movement.

Eaton's asides to dance and poetry are more than that. They are part of his creative process. He has done choreography work in the US, and developed a particular friendship with the avant-garde poet and artist E. E. Cummings, whose "Fairy Tales" he illustrated in 1965.

Add to it the Steiner movement, and you have the making of a profound, esoteric and unencumbered thinker. John Eaton lives to paint, and when he paints, he paints his life. The narrative is constant and in constant flux.

In *Walking & Thinking Free Verse*, making reference to Cummings, he uses visual tools to express that intellectual, and visceral force which guides him. His animal companion is there, curled in sleep, the spirit of the land is in it, but beyond the story telling lies the tactile world of pictorial expression.

What makes John Eaton's art so seductive, is the artist's complete, loving, all-embracing communion with nature. It has honed his character and spirit for decades, in a sense returning him to his very being, and that being is one with nature. As we all are, but forgot.

The great contemporary philosopher, Alan W. Watts, often wrote about our reliance on technology and instruments as enemy of our body and senses.

"In general," he writes in The Wisdom of Insecurity, "human beings have ceased to develop the instruments of the body. More and more we try to effect an adaptation to life by means of external gadgets, and attempt to solve our problems by conscious thinking rather than unconscious "know-how"."

That could be the secret behind John Eaton's sensual paintings. Nature and communing with it are, indeed, *instrumental* to his work. The mastery of the craft is one thing, and that come with age and practice, but the spirit of the work flows from a very different source and its main tool is intuition…