

# PENTICTON ART GALLERY

## Allan Harding MacKay: Gift of Conscience

**Sunday, July 12, 2015 - Sunday, September 13, 2015**

As a visual artist, Allan Harding MacKay has served as a war artist with the Canadian Department of National Defense on two occasions, first in Somalia in 1993 and again in July 2002 when he was invited by the Department of National Defence to participate in Operation Apollo, a pilot project for the newly minted Canadian Forces Artists Program in Afghanistan. Once on the ground at Kandahar Airfield he had only four days to gather all his support material only being able to travel in the area surrounding Kandahar and its immediate environs.

His movements were restricted to this site and except for a short trip to the Tarnac Farm area where friendly fire by American air crews killed and wounded Canadian troops on the ground, the days were spent observing and capturing on video the activities of the airfield and the surrounding environments as well as flying by Hercules aircraft in and out of Camp Mirage in the United Arab Emirates.

This series of works on paper is derived from video stills chosen from the approximate 4.5 hours of video shot by the artist during the Afghanistan assignment. The content for this exhibition focused on interior images shot within the Hercules aircraft, grotesque monuments of wrecked aircraft from previous conflicts and images of two large exterior wall murals depicting what appear to be Russian aircraft.

The production process for this series is one of layering. The initial computer rendering of the images determines palette and quality of line and contrast. Ink jet digital prints on paper are then layered with a mix of wax and damar varnish, oil pastel and paint thinner.

The resulting body of work was originally displayed at the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery in 2008 in an exhibition entitled; Transitive Space: Afghanistan Series and subsequently some of these works formed part of the artists two part project entitled Speak Up Speak Out, which was initially enacted on May 10, 2012 as a protest on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The Gift of Conscience, the second part of the project, was initiated on October 30, 2012. Both elements constitute a protest against the Harper Government that continues to abuse and dismantle Canada's position as a progressive and effective liberal democracy.

Writing about the reasoning behind his actions Allan states: "As a war artist previously contracted by the Department of National Defense in Somalia (1993) and Afghanistan (2002), I undertook the destruction of five original works based on these two zone assignments on May 10, 2012 in an event entitled, Speak Up Speak Out. This 'citizen action' took place within view of the Parliament Buildings in the Nation's Capital. The destruction of the art works, constituting aspects of Canada's contemporary military heritage, symbolized a much larger destruction of Canada's values relating to national

governance. The values of openness, justice, honesty, fairness and unfettered participation by all MP's is being held hostage by a government that holds the Parliamentary System in deliberate contempt and fashions abusive policies impacting, but not limited to, Veterans Rights, First Nations Rights, Workers Rights, Privacy Rights, Protection of the Environment, Immigration and Foreign Aid/Diplomatic initiatives. Clearly exercising an abuse of parliamentary traditions, this majority government shamelessly utilizes the tactics of stealth, deception, suppression and untruths to further its own minority interests. Recent Supreme Court decisions have pushed back against breaches of the constitution contained in legislation fashioned by the Conservative Government under Stephen Harper's leadership.

As a follow up to the protest on Parliament Hill, a multiple art work, Gift of Conscience, was distributed to the Prime Minister, the 163 Conservative MP's in the House of Commons, the Government Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. Designed as a signed and numbered edition, the art work is comprised of a boxed yellow velvet Glove with black text spelling the word Conscience.

Inserted inside the glove is a fragment from the previously destroyed art works of May 10, 2012 depicting aspects of Canada's military heritage in Somalia and Afghanistan. The Gift of Conscience was given as an artistic talisman to rekindle the individual conscience required to serve the citizens of Canada with honesty, integrity and reason in the service of the common good. The lives and health of many Canadian military veterans and humanitarian workers have been sacrificed in war zones all over the world in the name of democracy. The past years have shown that the fight for democracy is also a battle that must be fought on the home front."

As of the printing of this newsletter he has yet to have receive a single note of acknowledgement from the Prime Minister, the 163 Conservative MP's in the House of Commons, the Government Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. Local MP's who were sent the Gift of Conscience in October 2012 include: Dan Albas #42, Ron Cannan #67 and Colin Mayes #114.

His award winning video Somalia Yellow has been shown in video festivals internationally and One Yellow Rabbit Performance Theatre in Calgary turned Somalia Yellow into a theater production which they toured to Prague and Glasgow. Additionally a CBC documentary on his Somalia assignment entitled Changing Perspectives was broadcast nationally and garnered much acclaim. In 2003, the Government of Ontario commissioned Allan Mackay to design the Veterans' Memorial, in partnership with PFS Architects and was officially unveiled at Queen's Park, Toronto on Sunday September 17, 2006. Allan continues to live and work from his studio in Banff, Alberta.

Paul Crawford: Curator