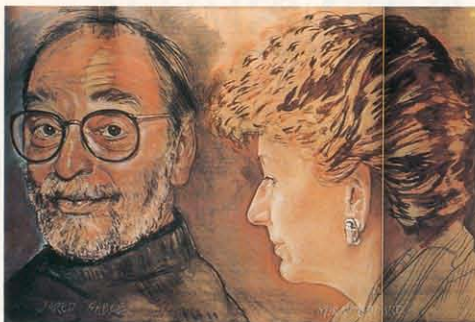
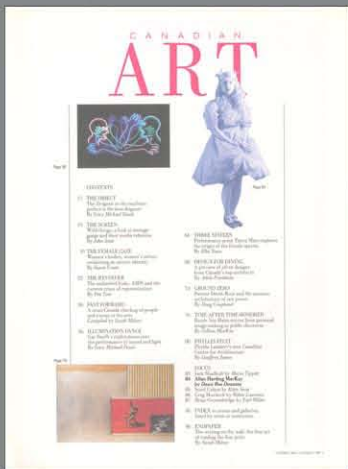


# FOCUS

## ON ALLAN HARDING MACKAY



Some Critical Countenances 1986-88  
Detail of Janet Soble, Mrs Godard  
chalk pastel, oil on industrial  
packing paper, 545 x 5 ft.



Some Critical Countenances 1986-88  
Detail of David Crown,  
Jeffrey Spalding

Allan Harding MacKay's over-size exhibition *Some Critical Countenances: An Extended Drawing* was shown at Halifax's new Art Gallery of Nova Scotia this spring. As a school-boy growing up in Charlottetown, P.E.I., MacKay drew on whatever he could find — cardboard, book covers, the manila paper in art class, and this new work consisted of a series of chalk pastel and oil portraits executed on some 545 feet of five-foot-wide brown industrial packing paper. The subjects are all players in the Canadian visual arts world, a world in which MacKay himself has been a curator, arts administrator, installation artist and painter.

There's a compelling contradiction to MacKay, respected for four years as the

director-curator of Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery until he left in 1983 to paint in Switzerland for five years, where he painted mountains and portraits, notably a series of "self portraits" incorporating his own image with that of 19th-century Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler. "The pun," says MacKay, "was to get in the picture with a master painter." He returned to head up Toronto's Art Metropole for a year until appointed director-curator of Harbourfront's Power Plant this spring.

For an artist so drawn to tradition and the ways in which he finds himself within it, the choice of materials in the AGNS and other shows seems rash. "It's a decision I made from a professional duality," he says. "When you're a work-

ing artist you have another sense of your materials and their necessity. I'm more interested in certain ingredients and forces that happen to the work to enhance its viewed aesthetic but don't enhance its longevity." MacKay is alert to what he calls that "edge of the conservational mentality which can override artistic and curatorial decisions." He talks about "natural attrition. Some things should last; the experience of others may be sufficient to the moment."

*Some Critical Countenances*, conceived in collaboration with Halifax-based writer and curator Charlotte Townsend-Gault, wrapped its informal portraits of Canadian curators, painters, dealers and critics (and even former communications minister Flora MacDon-

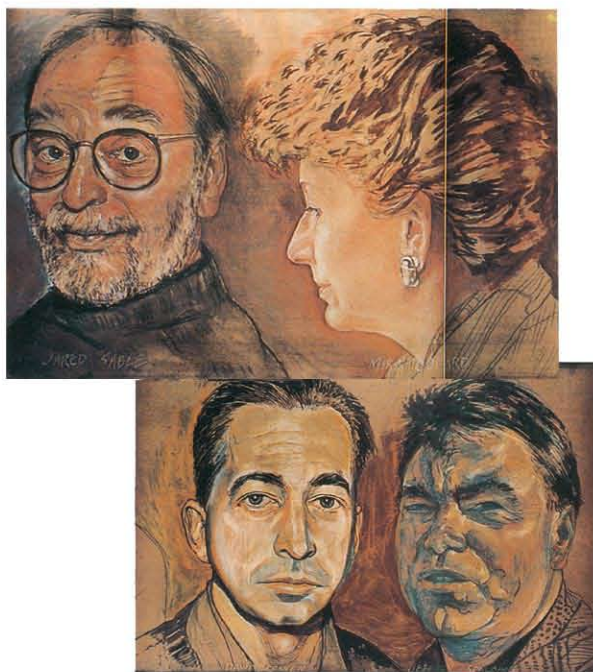
ald) around the AGNS walls. There was no authorial comment, although (typical of MacKay's work) the drawing comments on itself. Text over Max Walters, for example, "tells" David Alexander, "Dave, tell Joan [Stebbins] her glasses are crooked." A balding version of MacKay himself is also included, echoing his 1985 *Double Self-Portrait*.

Just down the road from the AGNS is the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, where MacKay, as one of its most likely-to-succeed alumni, headed up the college's Anna Leonowens Gallery in its earliest days. Some of NSCAD's best and best-known talking heads are in his picture, for as long, that is, as the picture lasts. *Dawn Rae Downton*

## FOCUS

## ON ALLAN HARDING MACKAY

*Some Critical Countenances* 1986-88  
Detail of Jared Sable, Mira Godard,  
chalk pastel, oil on industrial  
packing paper 546 x 5 ft.



*Some Critical Countenances* 1986-88  
Detail of David Craven, Jeffrey Spalding

Allan Harding MacKay's oversize exhibition *Some Critical Countenances: An Extended Drawing* was shown at Halifax's new Art Gallery of Nova Scotia this spring. As a schoolboy growing up in Charlottetown, P.E.I., MacKay drew on whatever he could find - cardboard, book covers, the manila paper in art class, and this new work consisted of a series of chalk pastel and oil portraits executed on some 545 feet of five-foot-wide brown industrial packing paper. The subjects are all players in the Canadian visual arts world, a world in which MacKay himself has been a curator, arts administrator, installation artist and painter.

There's a compelling contradiction to MacKay, respected for four years as the director-curator of Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery until he left in 1983 to paint in Switzerland for five years, where he painted mountains and portraits, notably a series of "self portraits" incorporating his own image with that of 19th-century Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler. "The pun," says MacKay, "was to get in the picture with a master painter." He returned to head up Toronto's Art Metropole for a year until appointed director-curator of Harbourfront's Power Plant this spring.

For an artist so drawn to tradition and the ways in which he finds himself within it, the choice of materials in the AGNS and other shows seems rash. "It's a decision I made from a professional duality," he says. "When you're a working artist you have another sense of your materials and their necessity. I'm more interested in certain ingredients and forces that happen to the work to enhance its viewed aesthetic but don't enhance its longevity." MacKay is alert to what he calls that "edge of the conservational mentality which can override artistic and curatorial decisions." He talks about "natural attrition. Some things should last; the experience of others may be sufficient to the moment."

*Some Critical Countenances*, conceived in collaboration with Halifax-based writer and curator Charlotte Townsend-Gault, wrapped its informal portraits of Canadian curators, painters, dealers and critics (and even former communications minister Flora MacDonald) around the AGNS walls. There was no authorial comment, although (typical of MacKay's work) the drawing comments on itself. Text over Max Walters, for example, "tells" David Alexander, "Dave, tell Joan [Stebbins] her glasses are crooked." A balding version of MacKay himself is also included, echoing his 1985 *Double Self-Portrait*.

Just down the road from the AGNS is the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, where MacKay, as one of its most likely to-succeed alumni, headed up the college's Anna Leonowens Gallery in its earliest days. Some of NSCAD's best and best known talking heads are in his picture, for as long, that is, as the picture lasts.