

## GALLERY UNROLLS LONGEST SHOW YET

### Would you believe 545 feet in length?

Former communications minister Flora MacDonald sips wine, artist Michael Snow moves from severity to a giggle and Charlottetown painter Allan Harding MacKay apologizes for "wrinkling" Peggy Gale. MacKay spent two year in Switzerland drawing with chalk, pastel and oil the faces of people in Canada's visual arts community. At one point he dropped the roll and wrinkled Gale.

The pictures, on three rolls of brown wrapping paper five feet tall and a total of 545 feet in length, are on exhibit in the show *Critical Countenances*, at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia to April 2.

MacKay, who now directs Art Metropole in Toronto, got the idea when he started painting landscapes and portraits in Switzerland. Born in Charlottetown, he studied art at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design before the conceptualist period and had been a gallery director at Anna Leonowens and the Mendel Gallery.

"I had this sense it would be interesting to do a portrait series that dealt with people in a community of interests which was the visual arts," he said in an interview in the gallery.

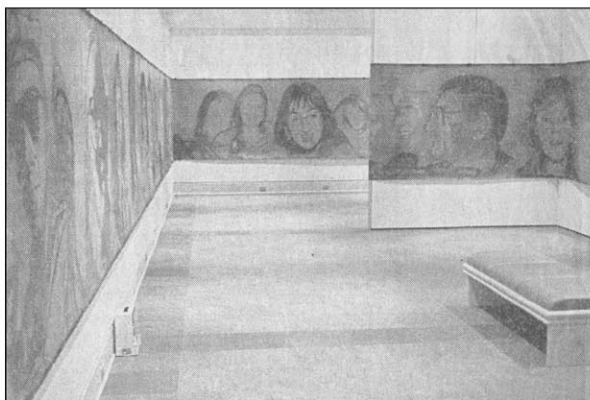
He contacted his friend Charlotte Townsend-Gault, a well-known critic and curator who is also painted into the work. At first they planned a series of individual portraits of art critics, giving the artist power over the critic. "When Charlotte and I talked about it more it didn't make too much sense."

MacKay decided to draw portraits of people in Canada who were "somehow critically concerned" with the arts. He decided against individual portraits for the continuous roll of paper. "There was no heirarchy. Basically they were all critical players in the fabric of the arts community.

MacKay, who worked from slides he had taken and that he projected on a wall, started with Alvin Balkind and then painter Michael Snow, both people he admired. "The rest just unfolded. I didn't know who would come up from one day to the next. There wasn't any lineage and narrative. The decisions became more formal. The end came because there was a deadline to get to the gallery."

Townsend-Gault calls the work deconstruction " in its inversion of the tradition of official portraiture. She was interested in MacKay's idea as it related. to the convention of portraiture which is now being revived, "That makes the work more than the merely anecdotal," she said at the gallery. "The more you know about portraiture the more interesting A is. How it fits into the 1980s, attitudes towards conventions of representation ..."

At the end of the run the exhibit will be rolled up and stored in MacKay's studio.



The faces of artists, art gallery directors and even politicians in teh 1980's stare out in a maze of portraiture in the exhibit *Critical Countenances* at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia