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Allan Harding MacKay: new artist in residence

Receives two month residency at CCG A&M

BY MARY MACKAY Lifestyles Reporter

What better attraction to have at an art gallery than a real live artist?

That's what the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum considered as they mulled over their new artist-in-residence idea. The residency program, will feature a different artist every two months, says Ted Fraser, director of the gallery.

"The two month residency is unique in Canada. It demonstrates CCAG&M's commitment to living, working artists, because it is through the arts that we celebrate the origin and evolution of Canada." The presence of the artist is important to the gallery administrators as well as the public, he said. "(It serves) to remind us that we're dealing not just with objects, but with the personal expression of the artists."

Allan Harding MacKay is the first to represent the contemporary side of the gallery. The Charlottetown-born artist focuses on the figurative element, still life and landscapes, along with text and bookwork. A career orientation week in Grade 11 and an ensuing conversation with well-known Island artist Henry Purdy led Mr. MacKay to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. At a time when the Island had no organized interest in the arts, he took a chance. "I think my father was more nervous than I was," Mr. MacKay recalled.

He enrolled with commercial design in mind, but soon turned to fine art. Upon graduating, Mr. MacKay he worked his way up from set painter at CBC in Halifax, to assistant curator, first art director, then director in galleries across Canada. After jaunting off to Switzerland to devote full attention to his art for five years, he returned to Canada in '88, to work as a gallery director for awhile.

This constant exposure to other artist's work, has been great for studying methods, techniques and new materials, Mr. MacKay said. However, he added, "other artists really don't inspire me in work. That comes out of a discipline and desire on my own" Over the years, the dreaded painter's block has hit a few times, but he says it doesn't last very long. The only cure is to work through it, he added.

In terms of acknowledgement, Mr. MacKay's career is going very well. "The most difficult thing is how to actually contrive making a living at it," he smiled. "It's always been hard. The reality is that very few artists make a full living from the economics of producing

work. Many artists are involved in other kinds of ways of making a living. "

He admitted that the rewards are difficult to measure sometimes. "It has its own surprises and creates its own demands. You can get critical acclaim, but that doesn't necessarily match up with compensation."

However, putting the pastels down in lieu of other pursuits is not an option for Mr. MacKay - art is in his blood. "You have to have some kind of (vehicle) for expression, which has to find its form. (Refusing art) would just be a denial of an aspect of being human."

Allan Harding MacKay will be at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum until Nov. 15. An exhibition of previous works as well as those he is working on now will open Nov. 1, at 3 p.m., along with Robert McNealy's Micmac Avonlea.

The artist in residence program is sponsored by Canada Council.

Caption:

Allan Harding MacKay is settling in to his new studio at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum. The Charlottetown-born artist is the first in a continuous line of artists in the new artist in residence program, sponsored by Canada Council.

Caption:

VARIATIONS ON HODLER, a series of self-portraits of Allan Harding MacKay and Swiss figurative artist Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918) are what MacKay describes as "dialogues" that occur between himself, Holder and, occasionally, the viewer.

Caption:

"The reality is that very few artists make a full living from the economics of producing work. Many artists are involved in other kinds of ways of making a living" - A. H. MacKay