

ART from WAR in SOMALIA

PROVOKES SEARING QUESTIONS

Bob Clark

Making art from war is only one of the contentious issues that surface in One Yellow Rabbit's compelling docudrama, *Somalia Yellow*.

The hour-long show centers on the video made by Canada's last commissioned war artist Allan Harding MacKay during a six-day visit to Somalia in 1993. The OYR production takes its title from MacKay's film. "I've always used yellow as a predominant colour in my work - so it's a link to my own predisposition, I guess" the artist told the Herald in a 1998 interview.)

Assigned to record the progress of the Canadian armed forces in restoring order to the war-torn African nation, MacKay arrived at the peacekeepers' Belet Huen compound just after the attempted suicide of the Canadian paratrooper accused of torturing and murdering a Somali teenager. As a result of his self-inflicted injury the soldier, Master Cpl Clayton Matchee, was later found unfit to stand trial; the Canadian Airborne Regiment subsequently was disbanded.

In *Somalia Yellow*, projection of the edited version of the film MacKay shot during his stay is periodically interrupted by interrogation of the videographer by three members of the OYR ensemble - Denise Clarke, Andy Curtis and Michael Green. Whether debating such topics as racism or the artistic merit of MacKay's video, or in their pointed examination of the artist and his motives for taking on the job, the three performers produce enough intellectual sparks to set off an entire college course in ethics or esthetics.

But it's the film that steals the show. Military equipment rolling noisily through the quiet towns and countryside and the ritual bathing of a child in the blood of a slaughtered cow are among the raw images that give the production its dramatic cohesion and Power- Clad in fatigues and seated before a microphone on a raised platform across the stage, MacKay fields the OYR trio's questions simply and directly, often with a dry, self-deprecating humour. His unassuming manner is in sharp contrast to the flat performances of Clarke, Green and Curds. It's not what these three say, but how they say it that presents a problem. Too often Clarke & Co. make Blake Brookers intelligent and subtle text the prologue is a gem of extended metaphor - sound stilted and forlorn.

Only Green, in the segment where he impersonates Matchee mumbling parts of his rambling testimony, breaks out of the production's monotone air of portentousness long enough to convey dramatic significance. And haven't we yet had enough of OYR's penchant for stylized movement - in this case, slo-mo creeping about the stage, either individually or in unison.

It leaves one thinking it's almost in spite of themselves that members of the ensemble have managed to come up with a show that merits such close attention as this one.



Allan Harding MacKay went to Somalia

Grant Black, Calgary Herald