



CBC News Online November 2003

DEFENCE DEP'T UNVEILS NEW WORKS by 'WAR ARTISTS'

OTTAWA – The Department of National Defence unveiled new artwork Thursday produced by artists sent "into the field" to document the life in the Armed Forces.



Detail from 'Patricia Platoon Commander'
by Allan MacKay

In 2001, Defence Department established the Canadian Forces Artists Program. For the inaugural year, artists Allan MacKay, John Horton and Ardell Bourgeois were stationed with an army unit, sailed with a frigate and flew with the air force, respectively. They joined soldiers in the Gulf region and Afghanistan. The works they created from their experiences were briefly displayed at the National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa Thursday.

"Today we continue the tradition of documenting in art the dedicated and honourable work of our military men and women," Gen. Ray Henault, chief of the defence staff, said. "Canada has a long and proud history of interpreting the work of our military through the arts. We hope this program will honour and advance that tradition, and usher in a new era in Canadian military art."

While war art stretches back to ancient civilizations, the Canadian tradition dates from 1916, when the first war artists were commissioned to record the military at work. Nova Scotian artist Alex Colville is one of Canada's most recognized war artists, having depicted a variety of wartime scenes, including from his visit to German concentration camp Bergen-Belsen after its liberation by the British.

"The benefit is obviously that you get the opportunity to experience something that you never would otherwise," Bourgeois, a B.C.-based artist who specializes in aviation art, told the Canadian Press. "For me, it's an experience I'm going to remember for the rest of my life."

MacKay's work, depicting life with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Kandahar, will be temporarily exhibited in Calgary's Museum of the Regiments. But while there has been mention of a cross-country tour, it's not yet clear where the collection will rest permanently.

It's likely the collection will go to the Canadian War Museum, which already has an extensive war art collection, including works by the Group of Seven, held in vaults due to lack of display space. A new, larger war museum is scheduled to open in 2005.

The Canadian Forces Artists Program is open to painters, sculptors and poets. It's not a paid commission but each participant receives transportation, quarters and rations. In return, artists must produce a number of works for the Defence Department. A selection committee has already chosen another 21 artists for the program.