

HAUNTED by WAR

By LISA WILTON
Calgary Sun

It's been nine years since artist Allan Harding MacKay was commissioned to document the Canadian Armed Forces' humanitarian aid missions in Somalia. Yet *Somalia Yellow* - MacKay's visual art-theatre collaboration with One Yellow Rabbit - is as timely as ever.

"The issues of war, the issues of conflict, the issues of our own subjectivity in terms of what we understand of the world continue to be part of our human condition," says MacKay, who was Canada's last official war artist.

"Certainly the issue of Somalia has come back to general audiences now because of the Hollywood production (*Black Hawk Down*). And the whole issue of terrorism and whether Somalia is training terrorists."

Somalia Yellow is based on his experiences at the military compound Belet Huen, where a Somali teenager was tortured and murdered by Canadian soldiers. MacKay portrays himself in the b1how while four actors grill him about the facts surrounding the controversy.

MacKay created the full length performance piece - which opens Tuesday and runs until April 27 at the Big Secret Theatre - with longtime OYR ensemble member Denise Clarke. It premiered at One Yellow Rabbit's High Performance Rodeo in 1998.

"It's a fabulous experience," says MacKay, who admits he has done little theatre. "It's really interesting, both to see how something is built from the inside and to be with a group of people whom I have great respect for,"

Although he was only in Somalia for six days, the experience haunted him for years afterwards. "I didn't personally feel in danger at any point," MacKay recalls. "Perhaps because I was in the military envelope at all times when I was in Somalia, and I'm sure a lot of it was being naive to the dangers that might have been there. "But I saw the evidence of destruction and battles. I felt a bit removed though."

While he's moved forward in his career, exhibitions of his Somalia-inspired prints, paintings, photos and video are still exhibited on a regular basis. "I continue to revisit the images," he says. "It's like a well that never runs dry. It's a compelling series and body of material that I continue to find inspiration to do work from."



CONFLICT ... Allan Harding MacKay, Denise Clarke and Michael Green illustrate war in an art-theatre collaboration, *Somalia Yellow*.