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**ARTIST AT WORK —**  
Toronto-based artist Allan Harding MacKay takes a break (above) from the hectic pace of his recent tour of the Canadian soldiers' peacekeeping efforts in war- and drought-stricken Somalia. During his visit, the 48-year-old recorded the images he saw (left). Mr. MacKay is the only artist commissioned by the federal government to paint a picture of Canada's involvement in the international humanitarian relief effort in the north African country. Mr. MacKay spent a week touring Somalia and has since returned to his studio in Toronto to transform the images he saw on to canvas. The 48-year-old hopes to have four paintings completed by December.

(Observer photos)

## Artist painting troops' picture for Canadians

### Government commissions art

Allan Harding MacKay hopes to capture conflict on canvas.

The Toronto-based artist returned to his studio last week after gathering images of Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia and of the people belonging to this troubled nation.

"We're talking about the context of conflict," Mr. Harding said.

"I think some of the best art work comes out of situations that are charged. It's an element that I think is very important."

Mr. MacKay is the only artist commissioned by the federal government to paint a picture of Canada's involvement in the international humanitarian relief effort in this northern African country — still deeply scarred by recent war and drought.

Mr. MacKay travelled throughout Somalia for one week via armored personnel carriers which have names like Grizzleys, Cougars and Bisons. Armed with sketch pad, notebook, video and still cameras, the 48-year-old said he "collected a lot of imagery" for his works.

The P.E.I.-born artist plans to complete by December four paintings under the Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artist Program (CAFCAP).

Mr. MacKay's works will highlight the air, medical and ground components of the Canadian peacemaking force. The proposed sea theme for one of the four paintings sank when the Provider was pulled off the coast of Mogadishu recently.

He said he will need some time to absorb all the images he has brought back home.

"I don't even know where to focus," he said on his third day in Belet Huen. "It's been a sort of all-encompassing situation."

### ARTIST FACTS

Artist Allan Harding MacKay is capturing Somalia's conflict on canvas. Here are some facts about the project:

- He was commissioned by the federal government to capture on canvas the Canadian peacekeepers' involvement in the humanitarian effort.
- Works will highlight force's air, medical and ground components.
- Four paintings should be completed by December under the Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artist Program.

Mr. Harding, who spent two years sketching prominent people of the Canadian art world on 545 feet of running paper, said his role is to paint an accurate picture of Somalia.

"Traditionally, the artist has been the subjective single observer," Mr. MacKay said. "From (the government's) point of view, they want some form of historical documentation."

"It's a document of a moment in time."

This is the first time Mr. Harding has aimed a brush at a military mission, but he hopes the pieces he creates will open doors.

"I think (CAFCAP) has a lot of potential," Mr. MacKay said, adding he has heard rumors the program may be axed by April.

"It opens avenues for artists to explore challenging contexts."

"And, of course, work is produced that becomes part of the heritage of the country."

## ARTIST PAINTING TROOP'S PICTURE for CANADIANS

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