

# SEEING THROUGH EYES of WAR

## *Somalia Yellow* lets theatre-goers see Operation: Somalia



SOMALIA ON TAPE: One Yellow Rabbit's Denise Clark brings video art and a little history to life in *Somalia Yellow*.  
photo courtesy One Yellow Rabbit

Natalie Sit

Dating from the Boer War, Canada's war artists took paintbrushes, pencils and cameras to the front to capture the military's experiences. In 1993, Allan Harding McKay was the last war artist to go to war. He took a video camera to Somalia to record images of the Canadian soldiers during Operation: Somalia.

While serving in Somalia, several Canadian soldiers tortured and killed a Somali teenager. McKay travelled to the town and captured the images where the event happened. McKay turned his video into a art project. It is now part of One Yellow Rabbit's newest production, *Somalia Yellow*.

"He shot 1.5 hours and it is a 45 minute [video art] work," says director Blake Brooker. "In 1993 camcorders; were absolutely huge, so he shot sparingly. He had no power whatsoever. Batteries are hard to get a hold of." When McKay came back, he worked with the video to create what he terms "video art." "The video shot is treated, edited and manipulated so the eye moves a certain way," explains McKay. it's not a movie "

The idea for the play, which uses the video clips to compliment actors on the stage, germinated when OYR ensemble actor Denise Clarke met McKay, thought the idea was interesting and brought it back to the troupe. Brooker says *Somalia Yellow* is about McKay but also about his experiences.

"It's about making the tapes, capturing the mood, discovering why things happened and how McKay was affected by Somalia," says Brooker. "It's also about how it happened and the connection between the artist and military. The elements, coalesce, converge and crossover in an interesting way."

McKay followed other artists, like Group of Seven painter A.Y. Jackson and painter and print-maker Alex Colville into the Civilian Artist Program. As part of the program, artists were given the rank of captain so they could commandeer vehicles when needed. Besides the video, McKay sketched and painted, but only the video will be incorporated in the play.

Next up for the play are the theatres in Berlin, Prague and Glasgow. Brooker doesn't have any worries about a Canadian story translating to the international stage. "It's about Canada in Somalia as peacekeepers, which is interesting given the state of the world," says Brooker.