

# WAR ARTISTS SUFFER as OTTAWA MOVES to CONTROL BUDGET

## Military can't afford to maintain program with links to Colville, Group of Seven

Canadian Press and staff

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So two years after sending a Toronto artist to Somalia to produce paintings about the Canadian Airborne Regiment, Canada's war-art program probably will suffer the same fate as the disgraced regiment and be disbanded.

"The [Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program] was a very nice thing," Lieutenant-Commander Jean Marcotte said, "but with the budget cuts we are now in the necessity business, not the nice-thing business."

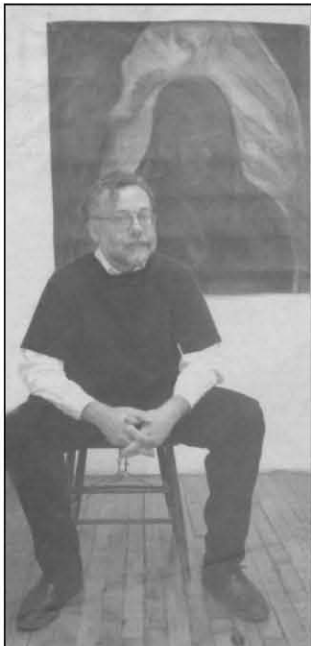
The civilian-artists program, begun in 1968, continued Canada's long history of commissioning artists to cover Canada's military forces in action. Its predecessors first hired artists during the First World War and once patronized such luminaries as Alex Colville and Lawren Harris, a member of the Group of Seven.

Co-ordinator Captain Jane McDonald recently recommended, however, that the program and its collection of paintings be turned over to the Canadian War Museum unless \$200,000 a year could be found to continue commissioning and maintaining military art.

"When you look at people struggling on peacekeeping missions because they don't have the proper equipment," McDonald said, "there's no doubt about what you do with art programs." (National Defence is examining the art program as part of its overall review of the department in the light of recent budget cuts. A decision is expected in the next few months.)

Canada's various war-artist programs have produced more than 11,000 works for the Canadian War Museum, including paintings from the two most recent major commissions - Somalia and the Persian Gulf war. "Artists can absorb everything - the sights, the sounds, the smells, the horror, the happiness," said Ted Zuber, who spent six weeks in the Persian Gulf region, "and maybe 100 years from now help people understand what we did and why we did it."

As a civilian in the war - holding the temporary rank of captain - he produced 120 sketches and seven stiff, somber-hued paintings, plus dozens more that he completed after his return.



Artist Allan Mackay spent about two weeks with Canadian forces in Somalia, then produced drawings, collages and a video to convey his impressions.

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He talked about his work at a recent war-art exhibition and discussion in Toronto, suggesting stories with Allan Mackay, who spent two weeks in 1993 in and around the northern Somali town of Jaldai. Harris with the Airborne, which was based there.

Mackay's paintings and collages are both an indictment and eulogy for the regiment, some members of which were charged with crimes committed in Somalia. Mackay related to the haunting death of 16-year-old Nicholas Aron.

"Everybody in that town knew," Mackay says. "They had heard the screams."

His work - pencil and charcoal drawings, multimedia collages and a jarring video - reflects the sad juxtaposition of a loving, well-governed military to an impoverished and brutal nation.

One of the truly disturbing images for him was the mutilated, mangled, bloody, and swollen bodies of soldiers who were found in a ditch.

The coll shows up in dense collages of translucent paper, photographs, newspaper clippings and text - a "form of information," Mackay says.

"Once I realized what went on there," he said, "it became the only way of thinking."

Mackay suffered brain damage in the middle stroke and could not be read. Few others have been contacted and one, Private Kyle Brown, was contacted in five years.

Mackay was not surprised that the government disbanded the Airborne regiment.

"I think it's appropriate. Having said that, there's lots of men in the Airborne who served well and bravely."

He is now surprised by the public side of the war-art program.

"It's really unfortunate," he said. "I'd hoped - really, it seems - the program would expand."

He talked about his work at a recent war-art exhibition and discussion in Toronto, swapping stories with Allan MacKay, who spent two weeks in 1993 in and around the northern Somali town of Belet Huen with the Airborne, which was based there.

MacKay's paintings and collages are both an indictment and eulogy for the regiment, nine members of which were charged with crimes committed in Somalia. Most related to the beating death of 16 year-old Shidane Arone. "Everybody in that base knew," MacKay says. "They had heard the screams."

His work - pastel and charcoal drawings, multimedia collages and a jarring video - reflects the odd juxtaposition of a bristling, well-financed military in an impoverished yet beautiful nation.

One of the trip's enduring images for him was the sunken, sand-bagged holding cell where Arone died and where Corporal Clayton Matchee later tried to commit suicide.

The cell shows up in dense collages of transparent paper, photographs, newspaper clippings and wax - a "tomb of information," MacKay calls it.

"Once I realized what went on there," he said, "it became the centre of my thinking.

Matchee suffered brain damage in the suicide attempt and could not be tried. Four others have both convicted and one, Private Kyle Brown, was sentenced to five years in prison for his part in the affair. MacKay was not surprised that the government disbanded the Airborne regiment. "I think it's appropriate. Having said that, there's lots of men in the Airborne who served well and honourably."

He is more surprised by the probable demise of the war-artists program. "It's really unfortunate, - he said. "I'd hoped - vainly, it seems the program would expand."