SOURCE/DERIVATIONS I
(Tom Thomson)

Detail: *Source/Derivations I* (Thomson), 1989
oil, wax, damar varnish, charcoal, pastel on paper
5 x 22 ft

Source/Derivations I was presented at the Ottawa School of Art in March 1989 and inspired by Tom Thomson's 1915 canvas *Northern River*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. The installation included a number of works in mixed media including drawings and waxed elements.

This first *Source/Derivations* project arose out of the idea of xamining an art museum collection in search of a painting of interest from which visual and textual meanings could be extrapolated and manipulated. The choice for ***S/D I*** was Tom Thomson's *Northern River* from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Attached to this excavational concept was the panoramic idea of laying down impressions - whether of portraits, figures or mountain landscapes - on rolls of cheap brown butcher paper that would hang like tapestries made to fit a specific space. In other words: find an image to comment on, draw out ideas on and pin the scroll temporarily to the wall. This was working on mural-scale, but not in mural-media. Ad hoc. Permanently impermanent, or impermanently permanent. Either way. Chinese, in a sense, but also related to the collaborative decoration schemes of the Group of Seven - the famous MacCallum cottage panels, now relocated to the National Gallery of Canada, for example, or the J.E.H. MacDonald-supervised mural scheme for St. Anne's Church in Toronto.

Installation: Ottawa School of Art

S/D I was mounted at the Ottawa School of Art in February/March 1989. Having estimated the length of the room in which the installation was to take place, AHM decided to compose a horizontal response of the same length, to Tom Thomson's art nouveau like composition of 1914/15, *Northern River* .The derivation explored through rhythmic symmetry and rotation the interweaving sinuosity of the original.

Installation view: National Gallery of Canada,
Source/Derivations I (Thomson), 1989
oil, wax, damar varnish, charcoal, pastel on paper 5 x 22 ft

Point of Origin, 1989
oil, chalk pastel, wax,
paper on panel

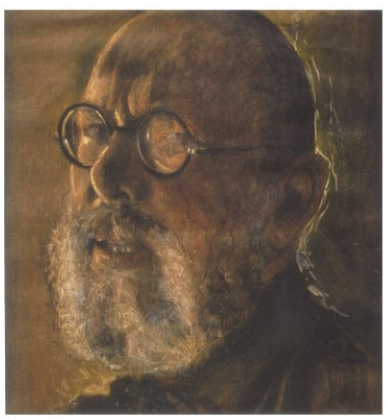
This central work was predated in concept, in 1987. While in Banff as an artist-in-residence at the Leighton Artists' Colony, AHM came across the Thomson painting in an exhibition catalogue, photographed it from that source, and returned with the slide to Switzerland, where he then resided. The outcome of the process was *Northern River Cauldron*, a drawing in chalk pastel and diluted oil pigment on paper. The title was inspired by the fact that after "flipping and doubling" the image, the S -curved central tree that dominates Thomson's painting assumed the shape of a cauldron - or an inverted heart and central in this was the emergence of a perfect mountain image: predated by the *Perfect Mountain Series*.

AHM's unkempt woodland interior also reveals a triangular "viewing device for a perfect mountain," imbedded in the heart of *Northern River Cauldron* and this painted image was later to become a central sculptural element in the *S/D II* (Harris) installation in 1992.

Portrait of Dennis Reid, 1989
oil and chalk pastel on paper

Source/Derivations I (Thomson), 1989
Waxed NGC curatorial file on *Northern River, wax, damar varnish, paper*

Source/Derivations I (Thomson), 1989
Waxed copy of *'A Concise History of Canadian Painting'* [Reid]



Portrait of Charles Hill, 1989
oil and chalk pastel on paper

For AHM, one way of confronting the quandary head-on was by symbolically populating the wilderness with the company of other visual elements: portraits and waxed documents. In addition to the huge pastel and oil on paper landscape were two large portrait drawings in charcoal and pastel of Dennis Reid and the other, his successor in the position of curator responsible for Thomson's *Northern River* at the National Gallery, Charles Hill. Both became instrumental in the organization of the major national touring exhibition of Tom Thomson in 2002.

Installation view: *Source/Derivations I* (Thomson), 1989
Ottawa School of Art

The additional elements were a waxed facsimile of the National Gallery of Canada curatorial file relating to *Northern River* (which reveals that Thomson called *Northern River* "the swamp painting"), a waxed copy of Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting (*1973), and a waxed, mounted colour postcard of the source painting .

Northern River was on view in its usual permanent location on Sussex Drive to the north at the National Gallery of Canada; to take in the entire extended installation, one would have to travel from the venue of derivations to the shrine of the source. Of necessity comes purpose. As AHM explained, "this work and the proximity of the Source to the Derivations operate in the context of there being the National Gallery of Canada and the Ottawa School of Art in the same city." Source to Derivations to Source describes the spherical \conversation of how one contemporary artist engages the past in the experience of the ever-present.

Edited version by AHM of original text by Robert Stacey

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Ottawa School of Art

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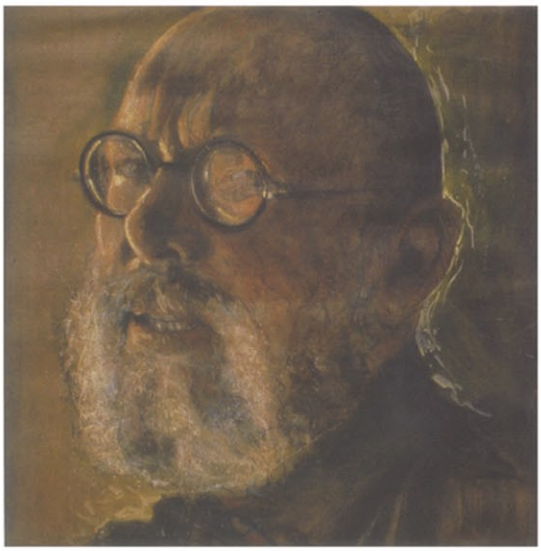
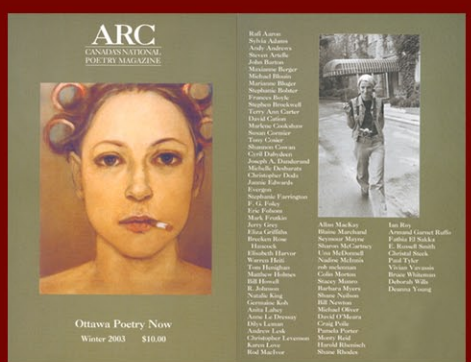
SOURCE / DERIVATIONS
An installation by Allan Harding MacKay

ELEMENTS:

1. A pastel and oil on paper landscape based on Tom Thomson's 1915 painting, *Northern River*, from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, symetricized and rotated.
2. A pastel and oil on paper portrait of Dennis Reid.
3. A pastel and oil on paper portrait of Charles Hill.
4. A waxed copy of *The Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 1973, by Dennis Reid.
5. A waxed facsimile of the curatorial file relating to Tom Thomson's *Northern River*, from the archives of the National Gallery of Canada.
6. A waxed, mounted postcard reproduction of Tom Thomson's *Northern River*.



Allan MacKay, *Charles Hill*, from *Source/Derivations I*, 1988,
charcoal, pastel, oil on paper. Courtesy the artist