

Exhibitions touching tributes

There are two exhibitions in downtown London right now that inspire even as they are touched with sorrow for me.

One is at Museum London and displays watercolours and other works by my late father.



James Reaney
MYLONDON

The other is the Michael Gibson Gallery's exhibition of drawings, watercolours and paintings to celebrate the remarkable accomplishments of the late Brian Jones, a former Londoner and a friend.

Brian and my father, James Crerar (Jamie) Reaney, died a few months apart earlier this year. Brian was 57. Dad was 81.

In the last months of his life, dad was in frail health but still proud his paintings were coming to the museum. I have the honour of talking about my father's works on Jan. 18 at 2 p.m. at the museum. The official opening of *The Iconography of the Imagination: The Art of James Reaney* is Jan. 16 at 8 p.m. I'll write about *Iconography* — an exhibition organized and circulated by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection — again. For now, let me invite you to see dad's watercolouring way with a tumble-down barn, Perth County landscapes, angels in Ontario forests and more.

When Brian Jones died of pancreatic cancer in February, it was a shock. Months later, there is a chance to see his life and art in context. At the Gibson are more than 30 works and some delightful clippings, letters, posters and other material from Brian's own collection in an exhibition titled *Private Window*.

One of its chief attractions —

London writer Bob Pegg's 1980 documentary film with the artist — has already been justly praised in Herman Goodden's column.

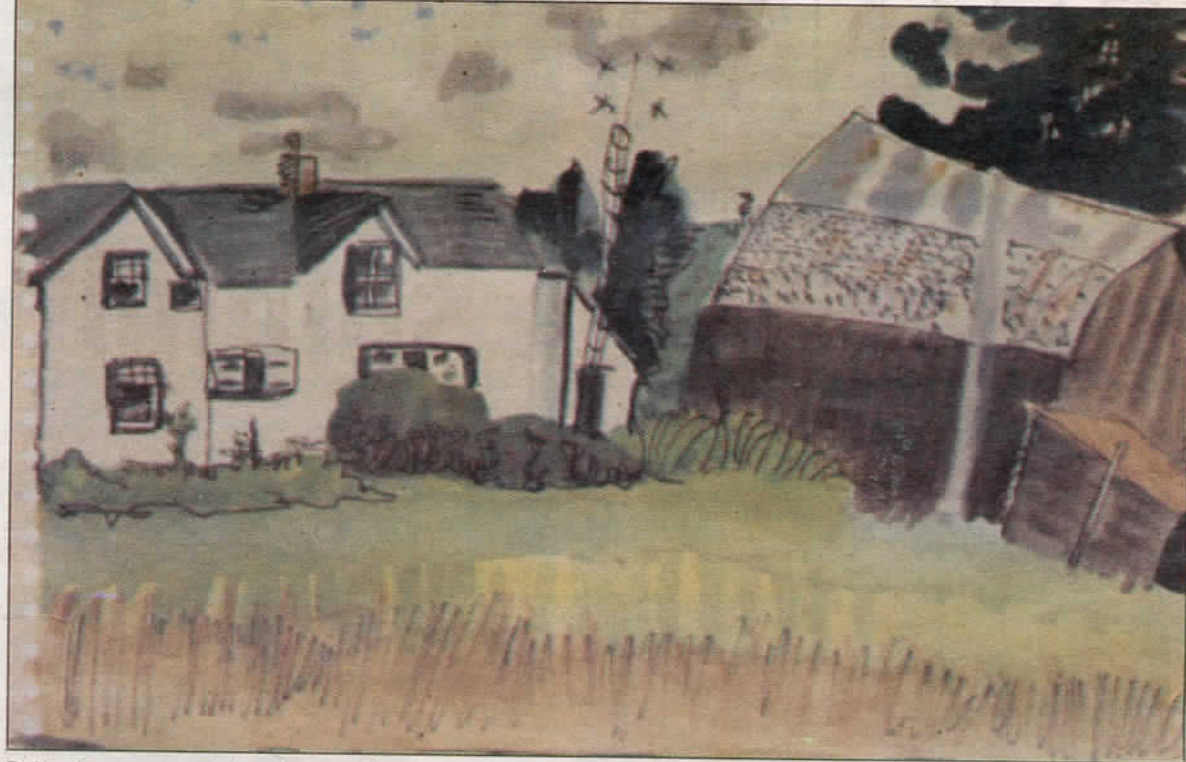
The paintings and drawings are remarkable. There is a mysterious joyful quality in the dream-like elongated balloon people — "neighbours" he called them — Brian so often depicted.

The exhibition's title *Private Window* perfectly captures the view of the artist. Brian looks out on his magical world, seldom interfering with the interplay of light and shadow and blue skies he sees around those balloon figures' activities. My second visit to this Museum London-worthy exhibition helped me see Brian could also paint a cloud or clouds. The angry mass boiling up behind his *Two Figures in a Boat* is one example. So are the puffy, bird-like shapes in that painting's sky. "Puffy" is a key word in a *Free Press* review of his work from 1978.

"I'm settling for the simple and non-academic adjective 'puffy,'" my former colleague Susanne Tausig wrote after discussing "balloon people" and "neighbours." Her insightful review of Brian's first solo show at the forerunner to Museum London appeared 30 years ago last week. Soon, the task of following Brian's career went over to others as the two became a couple. Later, they married and moved to Toronto and finally Collingwood.

Brian was also a collector of posters, music, toys and much more. At the Gibson is one poster glorifying stunt driver Evel Knievel and another for films by and about the late London artist Jack Chambers, one of Brian's mentors. Brian is probably the only person in London art history to appreciate both those icons.

Stay in touch. Call me at 519-667-4607 or 1-800-265-4167, ext. 4607. E-mail me at james.reaney@sunmedia.ca



Better known as a poet and playwright, James Crerar (Jamie) Reaney was also a painter. Maclean Township, a watercolour, is part of Museum London's exhibition *The Iconography of the Imagination: The Art of James Reaney*. It is owned by UWO's McIntosh Gallery.



Two Figures in a Boat, oil on canvas by Brian Jones, is in the *Private Window* exhibition.

LONDON ARTISTS

What: Separate exhibitions by London artists.

Brian Jones: *Private Window* continues at the Michael Gibson Gallery, 157 Carling St. until Dec. 27. Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visit gibsongallery.com or call 519-439-0451.

The *Iconography of the Imagination: The Art of James Reaney* continues at Museum London, 421 Ridout St. N., until Feb. 15. Closed Mondays, noon to 5 p.m. other days, except Thursdays (noon to 9 p.m.). Visit museumlondon.ca or call 519-661-0333.



Girl with a Skipping Rope is a Brian Jones oil on canvas from 1997.