

■ A TRUE REFLECTION?: One artist's work casts a colourful light on vaunted Canadian paintings



Group of Seven Awkward Moments (March Storm, Georgian Bay), Chromira Photograph, by Winnipeg artist Diana Thorneycroft, above.



Group of Seven skewered

BY KATHY RUMLESKI
krumleski@lfpres.com

The images are unmistakably Canadian — Tim Hortons coffee, Bob and Doug McKenzie, hockey, beavers — and so is the backdrop of Group of Seven images.

But Winnipeg artist Diana Thorneycroft puts a unique spin on Canadian culture in her latest body of work, Group of Seven Awkward Moments, launched this month at the Michael Gibson Gallery.

Thus, Bob and Doug sit in the wilderness of Tom Thomson's Early Snow, unaware they're surrounded by wolves.

"They're about to be devoured by wolves but they're so drunk, they don't know it," Thorneycroft says.

Apathy and being oblivious to one's surroundings is a common theme in the work, as is the relationship between Canada's landscape and identity.

Consider her diorama (a three-dimensional representation of a scene in which objects or models are arranged in a

natural setting against a realistic background) called March Storm, Georgian Bay that centres on a table-top hockey game.

The classic matchup between the Canadiens and Maple Leafs shows fans so intent on watching the game, they don't pay attention to the forest fire and fleeing animals around them.

Thorneycroft also points out that not only do we "make stupid mistakes" but sometimes these errors cost lives and harm our environment.

Thorneycroft, who has exhibited throughout Canada and the U.S. and in Moscow, Sydney and Tokyo, is not afraid to challenge our Canadian heroes and satirize them.

A jubilant Bobby Orr doll celebrating a big goal has fallen through the ice as Guy Lafleur and Bobby Hull continue their pond hockey game in the Winter on the Don artwork that has A.J. Casson's rugged winter scene in the background.

While some of the Group's Northern landscapes are etched in our memories, Thor-

neycroft asks: Does the Group of Seven art really depict our history, culture and tell us what it means to be Canadian?

"It's that claim by some curators that the Group of Seven represents Canadian art that I'm critical of," she says.

"I'm consciously subverting that claim by suggesting we make stupid mistakes because of bad weather and poor judgement.

"Canadian history is full of awkward moments and that is more of a reality than this heroic landscape that the Group of Seven portrayed."

She takes a look at the mystery surrounding the death of Tom Thomson, for example.

Was he killed by a jealous boyfriend, seen watching him from afar in Thorneycroft's Jack Pine? Did he commit sui-

cide? Or did he simply fall over while peeing from a canoe, as depicted in the West Wind?

"There are so many theories as to how he died," Thorneycroft says.

Thorneycroft constructs her work by acquiring large posters of the Group of Seven art or scanning reproductions and blowing them up.

She puts the two-dimensional landscapes on the wall and then constructs her scenes with dolls and other material she has acquired.

"I work in total darkness and illuminate the set with a little flashlight," she explains. She locks the shutter and takes shots of the scene.

"Once the photos are taken, I download them into my computer. I might cut and paste three or four photos into one and then I get them printed on to photographic paper."

Thorneycroft's work can also be seen at the McIntosh Gallery from Sept. 18 to Nov. 2 as part of the Hinterlands exhibition.

Kathy Rumleski is a Free Press arts & entertainment reporter.

IF YOU GO

What: Artist talk on Group of Seven Awkward Moments

When: Today, 2 p.m.

Where: Michael Gibson Gallery, 157 Carling St.