

MAG

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Paintings and Peameal (a.k.a. Canadian Bacon)

By Monika Burman

It's difficult to have a conversation about Canadian art without mentioning the Group of Seven and the rugged grandeur of our landscape. That's an undeniable perspective on this country. Another perspective on Canadianism would likely include Hockey (at any and all levels of competition), Tim Horton's coffee (sipped while trying to bring warmth to one's posterior at the rink), Beer (necessary refreshment, especially with Hockey-related events) and the weather (specifically winter weather and how much snow there is, was or will be). While none

of these things makes a whole picture of our culture, they are uniquely identifiably Canadian.

Bringing these different perspectives together is Diana Thorneycroft, a Winnipeg-based photographer. The show, on view at the McMichael, called "Canada, Myth and History", presents new work from her "Group of Seven Awkward Moments" series. The works are tableaus combining reproductions of Group of Seven works, or the work of their contemporaries like Emily Carr and Tom Thomson, with dioramas built from figurines, games, models and other paraphernalia. Thorneycroft conceptualizes the scene, then builds, paints and constructs it with meticulous detail.

The resulting images deliver on the awkward promise, with a healthy dose of dark humour and clever reference to Canadiana. In "Early Snow with Bob and Doug", the McKenzie brothers (of SCTV fame), get drunk while a pack of wolves circles them against the backdrop of Tom Thomson's "Early Snow". Inebriation meets enigmatic, eh. Arthur Lismer's "Sombre Hill, Algoma" finds a log cabin and elaborate dock system in its foreground, with the infamous Avro Arrow as a float plane, seemingly there for recreational cottage travel in Thorneycroft's "Avro Arrow at Sombre Hill".

A.J. Casson's "Winter on the Don" spawns an image of the same name that finds hockey legends Curtis Joseph, Bobby Hull and Guy Lafleur on the ice together, unaware of Bobby Hull crashing waist-deep through the ice at the other end of the pond. Other characters, including Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Santa Claus, and Winnie the Pooh all make great, comical and tragic appearances in images from this series.

Thorneycroft's "Lake and Mountains with Double-double" most succinctly brings the established imagery of the Group of Seven era into focus in a modern cultural context. Lawren Harris' "Lake and Mountains" provides the backdrop for a figure lying prone, rifle-ready, settled into the arctic with seals, a coffee, donuts and all. Contemporary controversy seated in classic imagery, with a not-so-subtle hint of Canadian consumerism. Oh Canada, our home and funny, funny native land.

Diana Thorneycroft : Canada, Myth and History, (Photographs from the series "Group of Seven Awkward Moments"), Through November 29, 2009. The McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, www.mcmichael.com

Cover: Detail, Awkward Moments (Maples and Birches with Group of Seven Winnie and the Pooh), 2009 chromogenic print, 60.9 x 76.2 cm, Collection of the Artist. Page 30, Group of Seven Awkward Moments (Avro Arrow at Sombre Hill), 2009, chromogenic print, 111.7 x 152.4 cm, Collection of the Artist. Page 31, Group of Seven Awkward Moments (Lake and Mountains with Double-double), 2008, chromogenic print, 152.4 x 106.6 cm, Collection of the Artist.

