

COMMENTARY

Sask. artwork has international audience

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Not

a lot of people know it, but a large number of works created by Saskatchewan artists hang on the walls of Rideau Hall, the Governor General's residence.

They also grace the halls of 24 Sussex Drive, Stornoway and the other official residences of Canada — Harrington Lake (the prime minister's country residence), The Farm at Kingsmere (the speaker's residence) and 7 Rideau Gate (official guest house of the Canadian government)

The works have been collected over the last few years through the efforts of the Canadiana Fund, which exists to create a truly Canadian art collection. They would not have been collected without the generosity of Saskatchewan artists and art collectors, though.

So far, Saskatchewan art donations — by artists — have come from Lloyd Pinay, Allen Sapp, Kaija Harris, David Alexander, Eli Bornstein, Douglas Bentham, Terry Fenton, Ted Godwin, David Thauberger, Greg Hardy and Joe Fafard.

Works from six other artists are being finalized; and a donation of several works — including a William Pehudoff which hangs in Rideau Hall — was made by Henry and Cheryl Kloppenburg.

(One of the Kloppenburgs' Inuit carvings was seen in a funny segment of Rick Mercer's show at 24 Sussex when Paul Martin was still prime minister. He picked up the carving, which was placed on the floor, to reveal a hole in the carpet. Tactical decorating, would you say?)

"One of the things we've tried to do is make sure the collection in the official residences reflects the fabric of Canada," says Paul LaBarge, chair of the Canadiana Fund board. "We've made a special effort, which has been responded to very generously by Saskatchewan, to really make sure that every region is fully represented and we have people who are noteworthy from each of these regions."

The fund is also pleased to have works from all of the members of the Regina Five, which is a regionally noteworthy group. The Regina Five are Arthur McKay, Ronald Bloore, Kenneth Lochhead, Ted Godwin and Douglas Morton.

In fact, LaBarge says Saskatchewan is ahead of other provinces per capita with its donations.

Works of art don't just slide into the Canadiana collection. Instead, the donated works go before an acquisition review committee, which assesses the works for quality; whether they are representative of a school, period or region; and how they fit into the scheme of the collection. Some of the art is also assessed for cultural significance, through a Canadian Cultural Property status board. "It's not a casual process," said LaBarge. The Saskatchewan works are not rotated as a group through the residences, he added. Rather, observers would see some Saskatchewan art at five or six of the residences at any given time, he said.

"We don't collect works to put them in storage. We collect them to show them."

Furthermore, the works do not create a grouping of prairie landscapes. They range from high realism to abstracts, noted LaBarge.

The Canadiana Fund began operating in 1990, but it got off to a bit of a slow start. Even today, admits Saskatchewan board member and Saskatoon lawyer Doug Richardson, it's not well-known in some circles — even in some art circles.

But in the last four or five years, artists from Saskatchewan have started donating their works to the fund.

"There's a recognition that, proportionally, we have a larger share of talented artists . . . and the Canadiana Fund has helped prove that," said Richardson.

He points out that having art hanging in the official residences doesn't just give Saskatchewan artists national exposure — it gives them international exposure. At Rideau Hall alone, 250,000 guests visit annually, including foreign dignitaries from all over the world.

"I do think it's increasing the exposure of our artists," said Richardson.

Every bit of that helps — not just the artists, but the image of Saskatchewan, as well.



This William Pehudoff painting, donated by Henry and Cheryl Kloppenburg,

now hangs in Rideau Hall



In the hallway of Rideau Hall from the Prime Minister's entrance