

*Hogtown in Depression and in war-time***Portraits of a raunchy Toronto**

BY JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

From the Shadows: A Portrayal of Toronto in the thirties and forties at the Market Gallery of the City of Toronto Archives (South St. Lawrence Market), to July 1.

This engaging display of some 75 oils, prints and watercolors about Toronto takes us over the rough patch of road between the heyday of the Group of Seven, in the twenties, and the emergence of Painters 11 in the early fifties.

Art-history buffs and artists will find in it a gold mine of unfashionable, unfamous and

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largely unknown Toronto painting from the Depression and war years. After all, to paint the city wasn't the most popular thing to do in Canada after the Group of Seven. The Group had fought like wildcats during the twenties for status as the Canadian artists to take seriously. They had succeeded. And they were not going to surrender that hard-won pride of place to a lot of whippersnapper urban realists. But this show contains much evidence of the continuing interest of Canadian artists in the facts of urban culture — facts which are as Canadian as any jack-pine, no matter what the Group and their fans and promoters said.

But this show of documentary pictures is really for Toronto's many lovers, not the art crowd.

Organized by gallery curator Heather Hatch, and accompanied by a useful catalogue, it lets us see Hogtown in Depression and in war-time and in victory, through the sharp eyes of Jack Bush and Paraskeva Clark, York Wilson and David Milne, and a host of good artists less well-known. We see

the hookers and sailors on Bay Street, lusting in a rainy night under hot streetlights. The ferry boat Trillium, chugging through a visionary, star-spangled night. Mechanized arms factories, the gloomy Don Jail by moonlight. Tough workers' neighborhoods and moldy back alleys and, over and over, the serenely graceful Bank of Commerce Building, towering above the low-rise city like a beacon of progress.

The show reveals a Depression-era and war-time Toronto that, surprisingly, appears to have been more raunchy than the one we've got, and also better tailored to the human scale. I leave it to those who lived through the period to say whether the portrayal is true. Whatever the truth of the matter, the art in this show offers a glimpse into a rich past, and is well worth a visit.

Art sleuths, take note.

One of the most handsome works in this show is a small, bold woodcut depicting the famous Bank of Commerce Building. The City Archives people do not know who did it. If you do, or if you have a hunch, please write me in care of The Globe and Mail. Watch for a roundup of responses in a future On Show.

Interior Rites: Domestic Scenes and Rituals, at Artculture Resource Centre (658 Queen St. W.), to Saturday.

Suddenly, there are theme shows of contemporary art everywhere in Toronto, on all sorts of topics. This one, assembled by Toronto artist Gwen MacGregor, proposes to survey current paintings, sculptures, photos and installations by nine Toronto artists who deal with issues of interior space as a three-dimensional fact and a psychological phenomenon. Her artists range from well known to quite new;

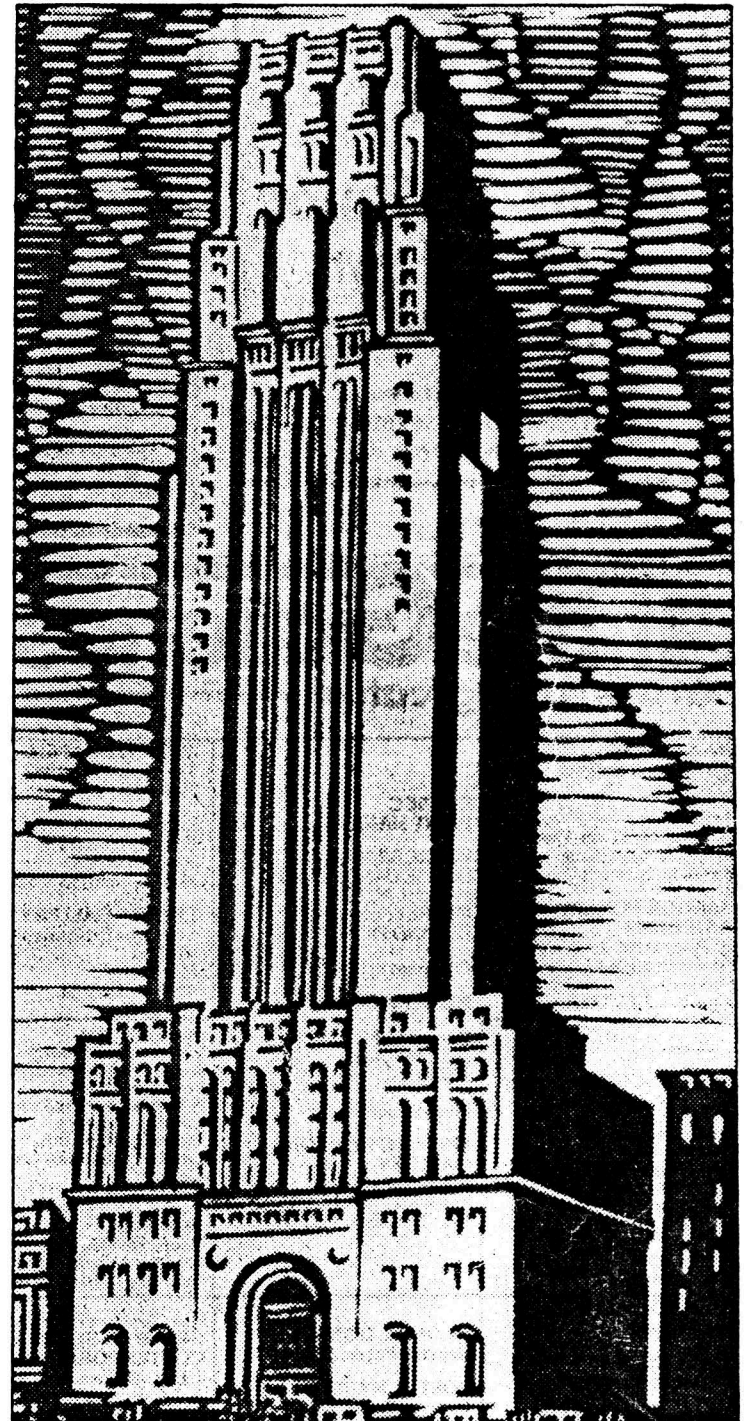
the lineup includes Janis Bowley, Eldon Garnet, Dan Hudson, Barrie Jones, Carolyn White, Gary MacLeod, Fred McSherry, Richard Storms and Pennie Unbrico.

There are some interesting pieces here, but Interior Rites does not live up to its billing. By and large, the works do not push very hard, or probe very deeply into their subject.

The plaster-pale young couple seated stiffly in their suburban living room in Dan Hudson's painting, for instance, seem all set to make a comment on the frigidity of a certain kind of domestic life, but the artist's romance with sumptuous painting itself takes over, rendering this work a kind of student exercise in art-making. In a number of other works as well, the topic of space seems to have been merely a springboard into some enthusiastic painting or elaborate carpentry. Serious engagement just got left behind in the headlong rush to make art.

Though the show is slight on the whole, a few works stand out. Dan Hudson's Late Night Show (1984) is an edgy look at the strange moment between late-night TV watching and nightmare. Eldon Garnet's fine tableau photographs offer arch, weird glances at interior space, and Carolyn White's humorous waterbed is a wry sendup of romance, beds and the kinds of desert-island-escape trash people read in bed.

The works of Garnet and White are the best things here. It's probably no accident that these two artists are also the only ones who aren't bewitched by the siren calls of suburban bungalow bliss, *la vie Boheme*, and other urban utopias. The other artists need to work through those complicated myths before attempting to make more art on the subject of lived space.



A detail of the woodcut depicting the famous Bank of Commerce Building, circa 1933, artist unknown.