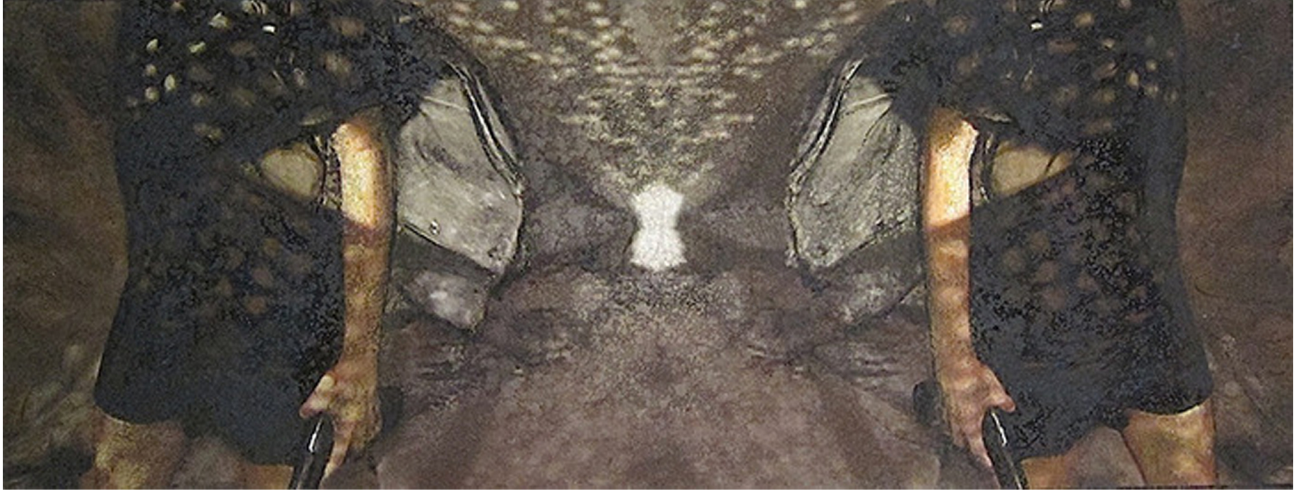


War artist joins international art gallery exhibit in Penticton

By Dale Boyd - Penticton Western News



BA piece created by Canadian war artist Allan Harding MacKay from his time embedded with the Canadian Military in Afghanistan.

In May of 2012 Allan Harding MacKay destroyed five pieces of his work created while embedded with the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan in protest of the Conservative government. It was that display that may be more moving than anything he has shown at the Canadian War Museum and the National Art Gallery of Canada.

"I had been following fairly closely the governance of the Conservative Party," MacKay said. "I really got quite fascinated with how the whole process works. The more I watched it the more I just became quite alarmed actually as a citizen." MacKay, who is displaying his work as part of a larger groundbreaking exhibit at the Penticton Art Gallery, has seen much more than the average citizen. "I was very disturbed, and continue to be, at the treatment of the veterans and issues with First Nations. The government continues to prove it's not interested in solutions, which I think many, many Canadians are." MacKay's work involves taking photographs like those he snapped while travelling with Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia in 1993 and the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan in 2002 and creating mixed media art pieces that take on a drawing or painting style. He was one of the first three artists to become part of the re-instituted Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artist Program after it was disbanded in the early 1990s. MacKay was based out of the Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan, a different view of conflict from what he saw with peacekeepers in Somalia.

"It was a different kind of experience in terms of the actual feeling for the people and the land itself," MacKay said. The project took on the point of view of the Canadian Military from the airbase. That fit in well with a project Penticton Art Gallery curator Paul Crawford was working on to display the dichotomy of a complex geopolitical situation through art by getting artists from Afghanistan to attend an exhibition of their work alongside MacKay's at the gallery. MacKay will be speaking about his work and subsequent protest at the grand opening of the exhibition on July 12 at the Art Gallery. "It was just to have a different perspective. The war artists program has been going for a long time in Canada and I wanted to have that other view of looking at their world through our perspective," Crawford said. "Then on the other side of the coin to see the (Afghani artists') world view from where they are at and just see how different they were." The work of five artists from Afghanistan alongside MacKay's will hopefully start a dialogue on an issue many view as distant according to Crawford. "Our government has sent troops and engaged our armed forces in the battle there. We're all party to it and we might as well be aware of what's been going on," Crawford said. Doors for the grand opening of the exhibition open at 7 p.m. and at 8 p.m. MacKay will be speaking about his experience in Afghanistan embedded with the Canadian Forces. The event is free to attend.