

WALKING TO MOGADISHU

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF ALLEN MACKAY

BY TERENCE HEATH

is the Enrii Nuuhi Museum in Nihoa. There is a lot of the spirit of the islands. There are 14 islands. Four people lived in the old time when they lived in the western part of the Nihoa Valley near the Chikona Group. The skulls of the women and children (five and regular). The skulls of these antiquities, probably from the 18th or 19th century, are not accompanied by the other. Perhaps the skulls were buried in the soil or perhaps the skulls were taken to the great island of Nihoa. The skulls of the male of the family were in the state of bone.

A fence, walking in the Bill Valley near
there, and both soldiers years ago, it would
surely, but nothing to do with an exhibition of
the work of Alfred MacKinnon, painted from
Chambers in Magdalen, mostly others at the
National Gallery in Toronto. Even,
perhaps, that the footprints are derived
somewhat toward the edge of the Valley
near the Nile and Red Sea land and
chances, literally, toward Magdalen.
Nevertheless, the two events on the same
and double—the one sort of antique
of the other. The ends of two years, however, to everything
in the end, and birds of the same as in the end.

We have been told things enough recently that the photograph is actually an *impression* of reality. And this impression is the *impression* of the analogue. The impact of both the analogue and a photograph are similar. The optical immediacy of experience dominates even when the event is distant in time and space. The *experience* is not not *become* present here in an unmediated, but because of the physical impact of a *presence* *presence*. Upright, fixed, horizontally actually walked in the presence of it is not a presence, it is not a *presence* (presence) from another body or system. The impression of this here is the earth's surface.

The photograph has become so common, so basic, that something of the possible reality of the impact of light. We no longer experience the awe of Daguerre's first eponymous 1825 picture. And yet the genre of reality studies is poised to capture not only our attention but our mind that because clearly the only impact of photography that our senses can decipher is the visual. We would, in



more (or small, as if of the past but the
military, at night. There are no, broken
for up through winds.

Julian Mackenzie writes with great insight and sensitivity in the accounts of the life of a young woman who is the victim of a horrendous crime. The author's sensitivity to the victim's feelings is evident in the way she writes about the victim's life. The author's sensitivity to the victim's feelings is evident in the way she writes about the victim's life. The author's sensitivity to the victim's feelings is evident in the way she writes about the victim's life.

The 4 black-crested and Magellanic items of the combination are clearly different, and, instead, form a group with the 2 white-crested items. In addition, a very thin black line below the ear (the Clarkian's mark) is present in the latter 2 items but is absent in the former 2. The birds in the latter 2 items have light shading of a grey and brown. The birds in the former 2 items have a black band the length of the ear. Although the image seen here might be to represent blackheads and greyish, thin shading in the neck, there is a range of differences in shading. These are differences in banding of the crown of the image at the joined area of the paper from a slide. Thus, it is not intended to make comparisons for the photographic quality of this image. Thus, two herons, in the photographic image pulled into the space of time and imagined into the observer's experience, of the present 2 herons, is a great creative discovery; the attitude has been

It is possible that it was the two stages in voluntary and high-intensity actions that involved the experience of using a tool in the movement in Nieuwenhuis and among the stages in this review. For once the a posteriori model, *delimited loop* is not simple delimitation, like the *delimited as grounds* of the previous model.

Black. MacKen has used the shadow of the feet and hand to picture shape in the drawing. What is the face? Is there a secondary blocking of light beams in the drawing? *MacKen: The shadow of the face is here of us. And the hand is compressed. The shadow of the shadow of these persons walking along the road is almost like a lateral cut face in the face. (MacKen).* No means of scientific interpretation, progress the probable weight, walking, psychological, are made up of components in the fading shadows. What her shadow can continue in these three visual images can have no real demand on our trust!

[illegible]

On the map, the *audubon* suggested by "willow." And walking suggested the *canon*, the moving not on the horizontal axis of the world, as John Barth has recently described it. But birds were from home and nature in nature. MacKenzie returning to the house on Prince Edward Island. Nature willow the mountain of hunting and bird-hunting. The line is the line of the line.

right: entrance to the Japanese room, 1985, 110 (top right); collage out of green bottle, has well known scene: framed wood inside collage made of photos.



1980. *Impression: The June Street, 1880*. 1 (12) inch oil on canvas, 12 x 18 inch. Signed, dated, and inscribed on the reverse.

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VERBAL SET

and all slowness, rather than the hard, flat rocks, are faced, unresponsive slabs, but fast, moving the spears not to make but to feed. Searching out rather than inventing the taste. The being is humankind as a deep-seated mechanism. The basis of Bruce Chesebrough's mechanical libido.

[illegible][illegible]

The Smulders team demands that you spend time doing this, not a rapid experience to be taken in at a glance. It also allows you to have fun with a demanding subject. Like the large text portraits of Charlemagne or the Sceptacles of the OldMan Game. Here the images are designed into 10,000 parts. MacKinnon has painstakingly assembled the parts and they don't fit together. They fit to show how man's mind digests experiences, but they don't really stick. They don't even suggest a whole in the fragments of art or technology that we see in.

It almost looks like the Paul Winchell photograph of the dead American helicopter pilot, mangled up and being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. McKay has managed to strip the life from the face of a man who is a pale shadow of himself. The dark, hollow eyes and the thin lips, which were so recently emboldened in Twain's impudences of the photos, are exposed like an indifferent gaze of indifference, even in death. Now to this point, a reproduction of Goya's *No is a judge*—even though there's a man mangled up in a very, ummm, subtle way. It's almost the shocking nature of the brutality depicted, that presentation here is almost an aside. The image and tone flow as in to that turbulent focal and the fact that home in war is still far is only one of the pieces of information encountered. It is the atmosphere which seems to rise up where some of this point is approaching the truth of human behavior through the slight ways of the world.



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And, yes, the *minogue* too is overwhelmed by the sheer number of images. The *keopans* are barely visible under the plethora of images and words. The minutiae of experience of the photographs are to meet itself, but both clarity and ease are being lost.

The ultimate paradox is a myth: at the end of the season in which we see a modest building would be held constant in place.

The scene is actually an *allegory* and the child is being bathed in the flood of a severely damaged civilisation. At the moment, the child is still safe and the staff still in place, a healing art. We, as viewers, are left with the act of healing being brought to a head. Not only can we not understand the story we are impressed with, but we no longer even want to believe it. And the artist seems anxious to be trying in the future (science, technology, automation, America) to find a way to bring this image somehow into the present period in which we live. But symbolically, behind the repeated bath, there is now a new, part of science, technology, nature in their first headlines, only a little more and a word is if they were as significant as Gods of the water and child. It is as if what was real has to be lost to be saved.

On the other wall, the limitations of the camera, those not in print of reality, are quoted and "We cannot simply follow the camera around the world. We cannot see what is just out of focus, and, and we must not continue to get out of focus," said the text. We are left with the words from the video wall read, A Canadian soldier says, "It is 45 in the brown swamp." A first photograph shows the black and white photo where one of the soldiers is seen of turning and falling. A small text in this first to commit suicide. In the Olshof Group, a few meters further along, the loquacious of his early success and the monument evidence of their night remains. We are surrounded by photographs of events which show in time. That evidence too is momentary and present. But, now, it is not a world which is lost and

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WALKING to MOGADISHU

Reflections on the work of Allan MacKay

By Terrance Heath

In the Kenya National Museum in Nairobi there is a cast of the footprints of hominids dating back 3.6 million years. Four people walked in the volcanic ash along a riverbed in the southern part of the Rift Valley near the Olduvai Gorge. The tracks of the woman and child are clear and regular. The tracks of their companions, probably both males, are a jumble of toe and heel impressions, one set superimposed on the other. Perhaps the two men walked in single file or perhaps one man was following the group, placing his feet in the tracks of the male of the family walking in front of him.

A family walking in the Rift Valley over three and half million years ago, it would seem, has nothing to do with an exhibition of the work of Allan MacKay, entitled *From Charlottetown to Mogadishu* recently shown at the Extension Gallery in Toronto. Except, perhaps, that the footprints are directed northward toward the egress of the Valley into the Nile and Red Sea land areas and, therefore, literally toward Mogadishu. Nevertheless, the two events are the same and similar – the one some sort of analogue of the other. The marks of our species determine for us everything we want to ask and little of what we want to know.

We have been told often enough recently that the photograph is actually an imprint of reality. And this observation is the beginning of the analogue. The impact of both the footprints and a photograph are similar. The odd immediacy of experience dominates even when the event is distant in time and space. The footprint is real not because anyone saw it or recorded it, but because of the physical impact of a person's presence. Upright, bipedal hominids actually walked on this piece of earth. It is not conjecture. It is not extrapolated from archaeological evidence. The impression of their feet in the earth remains.

The photograph has become so common we have lost something of the parallel reality of the imprint of light. We no longer experience the awe of Daguerreotypes' first viewers 150 years ago. And yet the print of reality retains its power to capture not only our attention but also our visual trust because clearly the only imprint of past reality that our senses can decipher is the visual. No sound, no taste, no smell, no feel of the past has the immediacy of sight. They are at best brokered for us through words.



The Charlottetown Series, 1992,
chalk pastel on industrial brown paper,
4' x 6'.

Allan MacKay works with these imprints of reality – not as documents of the real, but as the momentary evidence of events. With the pieces of evidence in hand, the endless work of investigation and interpretation begins. Unlike the paleo-anthropologist, however, MacKay does not direct and measure his investigation with the rationalist methodology of science. He is not reconstructing the context of the evidence imprinted on the light sensitive surface. He is joining the fragments of reality captured in the prints to the overwhelming and undifferentiated reality of the present. Of necessity, that reality, if it is to escape the limitations of the evidence, must be centred in the consciousness and memory of the person. In the end, we can trust nothing and no one, not even in giving out trust; this imprint of reality can only give us momentary reassurance that there was a past and that it is a part of our present. All the rest is conjecture and curiosity.



Left: **Installation:** *The Somalia Series*, (detail), 1993.

Right: **Installation:** *The Charlottetown Series*, 1992.

The Charlottetown and Mogadishu sections of the exhibition are strikingly different and, indeed, hung in separate but linked rooms. The larger of the two houses the Charlottetown drawings: large (six and a half feet high) drawings of a foot and hand. The hand is pointing to a place beside the large toe of the foot. Although the image seems on first sight to be repeated, backwards and forwards, from one drawing to the next, there is a range of differences in treatment. These are differences in handling the elements of the image as projected onto the paper from a slide. There is no attempt to deny or compensate for the photographic origin of the image. What we see, however, is the photographic image pulled into the space of the artist and integrated into the present experience of the viewer. The reference to a past event disappears; the imprint has been reclaimed, but not as evidence of the past.

It is possible that it was the foot image in volcanic ash and on light sensitive acetate that bridged the experience of seeing the cast in the museum in Nairobi and seeing the images in this exhibition; but once the connection is made differences leap to mind. Simple differences, like the absence or presence of the person's shadow. MacKay has used the shadow of the foot and hand as positive shapes in the drawing. What in the slide was a secondary blocking of light becomes in the drawing a major actor in the visual drama in front of us. And the hominid footprints? The absence of the shadows of those persons walking along the riverbed is almost like a betrayal of our faith in the footprints themselves. No amount of scientific interpretation, giving us the probable weight, walking peculiarities, age, gender or speed, can compensate for the failing shadows. What but shadow can convince us that these visual images can have any real demand on our trust?



Installation: *The Somalia Series*, (detail), 1993

Or does the comparison come with the vaguer cultural reference to creation and the beginnings of our species? Then, it is not the foot at all, but the index finger, reaching out from the grey-haired michelangelan god to the mannerist adam. The finger pointing to the foot in the drawings, the flat-footed steps of homo habilis walking away from the Garden toward the deserts of Somalia. Or the fragmentariness of the prints joining into the long western tradition of faith in some sort of unity or wholeness that can be glimpsed in the part? We have grown not to need the whole, even to prefer the part. The fragments of reality suffice. Who would like to have the Venus de Milo whole when she is whole from having been seen by so many eyes seeking perfection? The endless drawing in the art academies of casts of hands and feet.

Or was the analogue suggested by walking? And walking suggesting the nomad, the moving out on the horizontal axis of the world, as John Berger has recently described it, that leads away from home and returns to home. MacKay returning to his home on Prince Edward Island. Nomads walking the circuits of hunting and food gathering. The foot as the basis of all culture and all identity, rather than the hand. Not tools, not head, not opposable thumbs, but feet, moving the species not to make but to find. Searching out rather than inventing the future. The history of humankind as a deep-seated restlessness. The basis of Bruce Chatwin's intellectual labours.

Certainly, the transition from the room of Charlottetown drawings to the room of constructed art for Mogadishu underlines the movements of the nomad. MacKay has placed a video monitor between the two rooms, playing ceaselessly the footage he took as an official war artist during his ten days in Somalia with the Canadian peacekeepers. Much of the footage was shot from a moving armoured personnel carrier. The Somali villages, the desert, camels, donkeys, oases and then the empty, bombed, beautiful streets of Mogadishu pass endlessly before our eyes. We are with the new nomads, the armed soldiers in blue helmets. Only we are not walking. We stare past the armour, machine guns and telecommunications gear at the white, Arabic buildings, punctuated regularly by the crenellated mosques. Where the hell are we going? Nowhere. When we get there, it is still nowhere, just a tent city where an older paratrooper has befriended a monkey and a dog. And animals are not allowed, but the new animals – helicopters, tanks, cargo planes – are everywhere. Have we been walking 3.6 million years to get to this?

The smaller room is the room of work arising out of MacKay's Somalia. It is a room of more fragments – pieces torn from newspapers, juxtaposed photocopies on acetate sheets, carefully worked waxed collages, using pages from books with glimpses of parts of sentences, phrases, words, titles. It is a room of parts and pieces brought together into new contexts and contrasts. It is a river of images and texts. Where the hell is it going? It erupts as suddenly as the small rivers of East Africa that are there a week in

the rainy season and then live on as dry, rock-strewn trenches under a sun that rises at the same time every morning and sets at the same time every evening, year in, year out. On the video monitor a pile of waxed newspaper cuttings accumulates day by day as news continues to pour out about Somalia. You know the river of information will flow until the new nomads leave the country and then the silence will tell you Somalia is no longer newsworthy.

The Somalian room demands that you spend time there. This is not a visual experience to be taken in at a glance. It also does not leave you with a dominating image, like the large foot portraits of Charlottetown or the footprints of the Olduvai Gorge. Here the image has shattered into its 10,000 parts. MacKay has painstakingly assembled the parts and they don't fit together. They fit somehow with the most disparate experiences, but they don't make a whole. They don't even suggest a whole as the fragments of art and archaeology do, or seem to.



Installation: *The Somalia Series*, (detail), 1993.

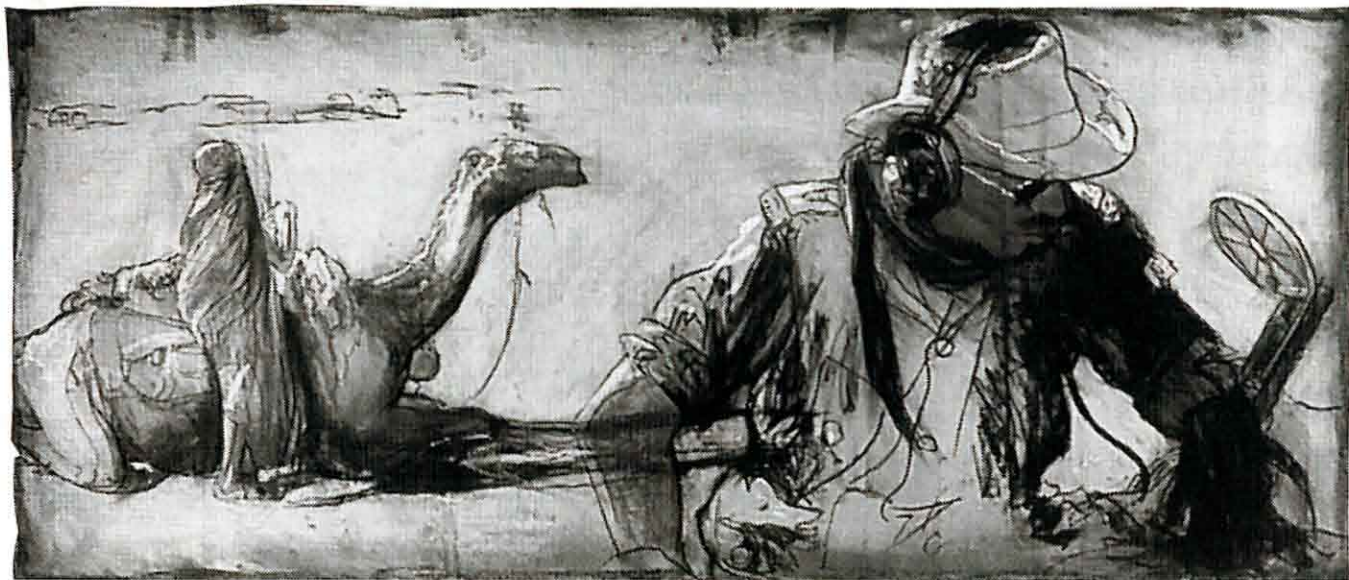
Immediately across from you as you move in front of the video screen is a series of works which, in their elegant, natural wood frames, contrast with the torn newspaper clippings waxed on to sheets of paper on the other walls. In the centre of the wall of framed works is the Paul Watson photograph of the dead American helicopter pilot, trussed up and being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. MacKay has waxed it so that the horror of the scene is veiled behind the wax's translucent coating. The dead pilot's genitalia, which were so carefully airbrushed out in *Time*'s reproduction of the photo, are exposed like an ineffective sign of vulnerability, even in death. Next to this piece is a reproduction of Goya's *No se puede mirar*, which shows a man trussed up in a very similar fashion. In spite of the shocking nature of the brutality depicted, their presentation here is almost an aside. The images and text flow on in their turbulent flood and the fact that horror in war is old hat is only one of the pieces of information encountered. It is the artist/humanist who seems to try to relieve some of the pain by presenting the truth of human behaviour through the slight visual screening of the wax.

And, now, the analogue too is overwhelmed by the sheer number of imprints. The footprints are no longer visible under the plethora of images and words. The immediacy of experience of the photographs tries to re-assert itself, but both clarity and trust are being lost.

The ultimate paradox is a triptych at the end of the room in which we see a mother bending toward a child covered in blood. The scene is actually an abattoir and the child is being bathed in the blood of a recently slaughtered calf. Presumably, the child is ill and the ritual bath is a cure, a healing act. We, as viewers, are left with the act of healing being literally a bloodbath. Not only can we not understand the reality we see imprinted here, but we no longer even want to believe it. And the artist too seems to be trying in the three versions (close-up, segmentation, distance) to find a way to

bring this image somehow into the present context in which we both find ourselves. Behind the triptych hang dozens of news stories, out of sequence, contradictory, strident in their headlines, each carefully mounted and waxed as if they were as significant as Goya or the mother and child. It is as if what was real has to at last be rejected.

On the other wall, the limitations of the camera, those true imprints of reality, are questioned: 'We cannot simply follow the cameras around the world. We cannot use cameras to get us into countries, and we must not use cameras to get us out of countries,' reads the text. We are left with the words from the video soundtrack. A Canadian soldier says, 'The AK-47s are the favourite weapon.' A last photograph shows the blockhouse prison where one of the soldiers accused of torturing and killing a Somali civilian tried to commit suicide. In the Olduvai Gorge, a few meters further along, the footprints of our early ancestors end. The momentary evidence of their reality remains. We are surrounded by photographs of events much closer in time. That evidence too is momentary and present. But, now, it is our world which is less real.



The Somali Series: Camel, Somali and Canadian Soldier, 1993 chalk pastel on industrial brown paper, 4 x 15".

Collection: Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artist program [CAFCAP].