

## Intricate doodles a façade for life's mystery

by MERLIN HOMER

The guest book at the gallery door contains such comments as "it reminds me of embroideries," "must take a great deal of patience," "a technical tour de force" and "very interesting—I wish I could read it." The comments refer to 28 works of art by French graphic artist Gerard Sendrey, not unlike intricate doodles, which recently finished showing at the Samuel J. Zacks Gallery in Stong College.

At random, choose one Sendrey drawing for closer examination: a white page appears to have writing on it. In the midst of this writing, almost like a pasted-on cut-out, is an image of a man, woman and dog. The man appears frozen in movement in his walk towards one edge of the page; the woman is frozen facing the other way. She and the dog appear to have been captured in animated conversation. The faces of all three—man, woman and dog—appear oddly both staring and alert.

These images are built up of pure, clear lines, and of textures made from thousands and thousands of tiny, perfectly executed lines. To see such work sustain, without repetition, around the walls of a large

gallery like Zacks is a remarkable experience. Overwhelming at first is its technical brilliance. Subsequently, the patience and fertility of the mind from which these images have so painstakingly emerged becomes apparent. These are not drawings from life, but men, women, children and animals who have seemingly come from nowhere: the multitude of perfectly executed lines seem to have given birth to them. Their faces are caught up in the flowing, insistent rhythms of texture and line. It is as if they have emerged only for this moment, for the viewer to glimpse, and could dissolve away into the intricate, living web of the lines again at any moment.

The writing also is an integral part of about half of these pictures. At first it seems to be just one more way of playing with lines. If writing is made of letters and words, then this is not writing. This is only line, making its way through curves, loops, peaks, and dips so that it looks like writing. Several visitors to the exhibition complained when they realized the writing could never be read.

Yet such judgements are hasty. What are Gerard Sendrey's images but lines that have temporarily tricked the viewer into thinking he sees a man, woman or a dog? Similarly, the 'writing' is another optical game. Both cases create illusion, but it is the second—the writing that is not writing—that teases the spectator into seeing that the line is its own reality. The works dig even deeper. The woman and dog, apparently earnestly speaking in the image mentioned earlier, seem frozen in the act of communication. But there is a blankness, a mystery in this act. Their communication can never be deciphered. This seems to be an ultimate meaning in Sendrey's work, that familiar faces, language itself, are just the friendly façade of a mystery that can never be resolved.

Thus Sendrey charms, amuses, and finally—moves his audience. His gently probing pen and ink finally reach a point where the inscrutability of ordinary human acts is recognized.

## Spirit of Louis Riel resurrected in powerful graphite renderings

By JANICE GOLDBERG

Louis Riel remains one of the most controversial figures in early Canadian history. His struggle and martyrdom for the independence of the Métis ensconced Riel as a Canadian folk hero. *Riel Remembered*, an exhibition of 15 graphite drawings by Gerald McMaster (at the Winters College Art Gallery until October 9), commemorates the 100th anniversary of the North West Rebellion of 1885. Contrary to the show's title, the drawings are not biographical. Instead, the spirit of Riel the folk hero, thematically bonds the various images depicting the people and events surrounding the Rebellion.

McMaster, a Cree/Métis, is currently curator of Indian Art at the National Museum of Man in Ottawa. He explains the contemporary, political message of his show, saying that the Rebellion "was and always will be a fight for the Métis to remain a distinct group."

McMaster's powerful, often larger-than-life drawings, evoke the events and personalities of the period. Although his skillful use of the techniques of photorealism give believability to the drawings, his use of gross distortion combined with firm compositional control contribute to the rather propagandist nature of the works.

The portrait "John A. MacDonald" is a considerably unflattering presentation of its subject. MacDonald's facial features are stretched, flattened and magnified in various proportions so that he appears unmistakably rodent like. The beady eyes which meet the viewers' nervously, framed by troubled, furrowed eyebrows, suggest vulnerability and melancholy.

"Poundmaker," in contrast, emphatically evokes the majesty and power of its subject. A Cree Chief,



**POUNDMAKER:** Gerald McMaster's drawing evokes majesty and power.

Poundmaker was a key figure in the events of the Rebellion, negotiating with the Canadian government on behalf of both the Indians and Métis. He is portrayed as obviously poised and self-assured. His chiselled facial features, together with his ornamental costume and markings, portray greatness and authority. Poundmaker seems to stare prophetically into the distance. His greatly oversized hands—McMaster's only use of distortion in this drawing—clutching his pipe pensively, are at once symbolic of great strength and gentle wisdom.

Although McMaster's drawings can be compared to the caustic polit-

ical caricatures of Daumier (both artists rely on distortion and exaggeration for their communication), McMaster's drawings, because of their large size, clarity and compelling representation of three dimensional forms, have a stronger, more foreboding presence.

McMaster's drawings leave little ambiguity with respect to his political sentiments. The viewer leaves *Riel Remembered* with an empathy for the plight of the Métis, and with new insight into, as McMaster says, "Events and situations which we cannot change, that we hope will never be repeated again."

## Goldmine of talent in faculty readings

by STEPHEN MILTON

Something new this way comes. Amidst the mass of student arts events on campus a new creature appears. Faculty. The Faculty of Arts is sponsoring a series of readings to showcase both prose and poetry by faculty members. Commemorating York's 25th anniversary the readings are being held every Wednesday night in the Calumet Common Room for the next five weeks. If the first reading of September 18th is anything to go by it would be well worth checking out the remaining four.

The Dean of Arts, Tom Travis, told the audience that the decision to showcase the faculty's talent was made in recognition of the distinguished accomplishments of the uni-

versity's writers, who made a series based on visiting writers unnecessary. The reading featured the poetry of two English professors, Suzanne Collins and Fred Gaysek, as well as the short stories of Michael Gilbert of the Philosophy department. All three writers presented extremely accessible work, making the evening enjoyable even for those most sceptical of literary events.

Suzanne Collins started the reading with a poem which her daughter had characterized as "one of the poems written by people older than ten about being younger than ten." This description proved to capture an important element in all of the poems she read, which alternatively explored the experience of child and parent. In her longest piece of the night, "Please Contact Next of Kin," both of these perspectives were united in the childhood recollections of a mother travelling back to her birthplace amidst the confusion of a summer vacation spent with her children.

Fred Gaysek followed with his own brand of poetry which provided an interesting contrast to the more conventional work by Collins. Gaysek's reading included some material from his *Young Man and the Dog* series, as well as some of his more recent work based on his visits to Nicaragua. The evening was concluded by two short stories by Michael Gilbert, who read a long piece reminiscent of Woody Allen's early short stories, both in style and humour.

The vast majority of the audience was faculty members, which is disappointing in view of the highly entertaining nature of the reading. As one of the few students commented at the end of the session, "it sure beats watching M\*A\*S\*H." ■

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