

Harold Town: works on paper exhibited at Canada House

For the next three months, the Canada House Gallery in Trafalgar Square will be playing host to a major exhibition of works by Canadian artist Harold Town. Here is a preview of what visitors to the Gallery can expect to see.

Vale Variation # 150
1975
Collage, gouache,
compressed charcoal on
crescent board



Harold Town: Works on Paper 1952-1987 shows the creative range and extraordinary inventiveness of this highly accomplished Canadian artist. For those not familiar with his work, the Canadian Encyclopedia describes him as 'a unique figure, the most diversely talented artist of his time and perhaps in Canadian history.'

Town's creative expression is unbounded: murals and portraits, drawings and sculpture, collages, prints and book illustrations. In the decade from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, he commanded the most attention of any visual artist working in English Canada, and last year, the Art Gallery of Ontario highlighted his accomplishments in *Harold Town: A Retrospective*.

This latter exhibit emphasised his paintings and collages, whereas the retrospective at Canada House stresses his achievements in works on paper over his 30-year career.

Born in Toronto in 1924, Town first gained critical acclaim for his illustrations in magazines like *Mayfair*. His first major one-man showing in 1954, *Single Autographic Prints*, was quickly followed by international exhibits in South America, Europe and the United States.

In November, 1953, Town joined ten other Canadian artists, including the now-famous William Ronald and Jack Bush, to form Painters Eleven, a radical group which exhibited from 1954 to 1960. The group rejected the landscape tradition prevalent in Canada at the time in favour of work that showed the influence of New York abstract expressionist painting.

Always the individualist, even when he was a member of Painters Eleven (the group disbanded in 1960), Town concentrated on printmaking and collages, eschewing both Toronto tradition and New York avant-garde influence (the New York impact came to show up more in his paintings of the 1960s).

Town gives all his creative energy to whatever medium he is concentrating on, whether it is a work on paper, a painting or a collage. For instance, he has never used drawings just as preparations for paintings; a series of his drawings stands on its own as much as a series of paintings.

Nine themes represented

He invariably works on a particular theme, and one theme may occupy him for anywhere from a few months to several years, during which time he may produce a few works or many hundred. In the exhibition at Canada House, there are nine themes represented, and the works chosen are only a small number of the many hundreds he produced for each one.

Although the exhibition spans Town's career chronologically, it does not show a straight path in his artistic development. It is not possible to classify Town in that way, taking an early, middle and late work and tracing changes from one to the other in a logical sequence. Works done 30 years ago are as complex and challenging as those in progress now.

It is also not possible to give a single description of Town's drawing style. His extraordinary draughtsmanship is expressed in many techniques and subjects. For instance, in the first theme represented

Rasputin with Upper Class
Ladies 1916
1985
Pencil on NpH rag board

