

David Thauberger exhibition opens soon at Canada House

It was in 1980, through an exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, that David Thauberger's paintings first received major national attention. The exhibition *Pluralities*, comprising the work of 19 artists from across the country, illustrated the many directions in which contemporary Canadian art was moving. Even within that context, Thauberger's work struck a curious note.

He was the only painter included, and his references to folk art stood out in an exhibition that was dominated by avant-garde sculpture and installations. His work to that time revealed a clarity in formal terms and a complexity of approach in his subject matter. Since then, these characteristics have been further confirmed and strengthened.

Thauberger was born in 1948 in Holdfast, Sas-

Old Faithful, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 50in., January 1983



katchewan, a small community northwest of Regina, the provincial capital. After undergraduate studies in Regina he took an MA at California State University, Sacramento, and an MFA at the University of Montana. He has worked as a teacher and arts administrator in Regina (most recently spending two years as Visual Arts Consultant to the Saskatchewan Arts Board), and has lectured extensively on Saskatchewan folk art.

Initially, the principal emphasis of his art was on ceramics. It wasn't until 1974 that he began working exclusively on painting. By that time, his ceramic work had developed into complex tableaux of local scenes. In contrast, his early paintings were rigidly structured with emblematic images of animals, birds or fishes repeated in grids across the surface.

In his paintings from the later 1970s, he took up the genre subject matter of his ceramic work, but set it into the rigorous formalism of his earlier paintings. The theme of vernacular architecture presented in strict frontality — which he began at that time — has become the leitmotif of his work. It marks both the earliest painting in this exhibition, *Dance Hall*, and the most recent, *Hotel*.

This conjunction between a clear formal structure and subject matter drawn from the environment in which he grew up became the means of identifying what it meant to him to be a professional artist in a small community. It was a determined choice in view of the recent history of painting in the region.

A strong link with New York modernists painting had been formed by a group of artists in the 1950s, who became nationally known as the Regina Five. Members of this group had also established a summer workshop for professional artists at Emma Lake in Northern Saskatchewan. Major American artists and critics were invited as workshop leaders — notably Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski and Clement Greenberg.

Through such contacts, strong stylistic and conceptual ties linked artists in Saskatchewan with formalist art in New York.

Images presented individually

Thauberger's images have often included the facades of suburban houses, the fronts of shops and churches, and public and community buildings. These images are presented individually, and invariably in a strictly frontal manner. They are, in their formality, like passport photographs — a means to present everything on a common basis, producing identification without identity.

The strength of these paintings lies in the way that Thauberger has combined several levels of reference. On one level, they have, as images, the enhanced character of picture postcards, an assertion that their subjects are as worthy of attention as the images collected from places far away; and, as paintings, they have the monumentality to secure that attention.

On another level, they give meaning to regionalism, asserting that human values in one place are as significant as those anywhere else. The place that is illustrated is recognised in terms of its history, the people who made it and the notion of community that gives it continuity.