



Photo by Phil Sheeha

Dave McKay

by Elizabeth Smith

The most famous and popular artist in the United States today is undoubtedly the New England realist, Andrew Wyeth. Much of Wyeth's work is done in Maine, a state very similar in landscape to New Brunswick, so it is perhaps more than coincidence that two New Brunswick artists are often compared to Wyeth in technique and subject. That is, the artists Alex Colville of Sackville and Tom Forrestal of Fredericton. Last winter another artist of the same convention introduced himself to Fredericton through local exhibitions, causing excitement in art circles.

His work first appeared in an exhibit of local artists at the Beaverbrook Hotel. Next he showed some pieces in the displaycases near the Playhouse. Finally David McKay had a one-man show in the Unitarian Hall of downtown Fredericton. These paintings were very quickly sold. One large acrylic canvas (see page 2) was brought by the University of New Brunswick for its private collection, after it was spotted by Bruno Bobak, a member of the purchasing committee.

Because of the strong similarities between the canvases of McKay and Forrestal, there had been speculation that McKay had studied with Tom Forrestal, but this was not so. David McKay has had no formal art training. He has done intensive study on his own of books and reproductions. As he does not paint from life, Mr. McKay gets many of his ideas from the paintings he studies. He says, "I look at paintings just like I would go out and look at the countryside."

David McKay is very aware of the superficial resemblance between his work and that of Colville, Wyeth and Forrestal, especially the latter. He says, "I use the same subject matter as Forrestal, but we paint in quite a different style."

"My paintings look more like Forrestal or Wyeth, but I've learnt more from Colville. I can look at his work and see how he fits little objects into the design. His designs always intrigue me."

In an article on Andrew Wyeth, David McCord says,

Poets, painters, and musicians sometimes choose to live, and strictly operate, within a very special world defined by very special boundaries self-imposed. They do not set out to discover these worlds; they appear to be born within them. As they mature and develop, the shape and character of their environment, accepted or adapted, increasingly appear to strengthen and sustain them technically as well as philosophically. When we read, inspect, or listen to their work we enter into their domain far more than they do into ours.

David McKay is only twenty-five, so he still has a lot of maturing and developing to do, but already he fits into McCord's special group of artists. He has created his own world - a

a new east coast realist

world in silence, unpeopled except for the barns and fenceposts that have been left behind.

His paintings, both acrylics and watercolours, all depend on rural New Brunswick landscape for subject content. As his wife comments, David McKay paints mostly, "old barns and fence posts", but he adds that "sometimes I do burnt out trees, rocks and things". He traces his affinity to the countryside back to vacations in his youth, exploring fields and barns near his grandmother's home in Prince William.

These are the subjects of his work, but subject is not his chief concern. "I think I like shapes. That's why I paint old barns and fence posts. Abstract art or sculpture is pure art. It's pure design. This realistic stuff . . ." David McKay has difficulty completing his thought, muttering, "That's why I paint. I can't talk." Finally he comes up with "Incorporating pure design with the lines and harmonies of realistic things may make it look better."

He has tried abstract painting but does not find it satisfactory, "I like trees and grass and old fence posts, so I try to combine them with design."

Sculpture is a medium Mr. McKay thinks he would find conducive to his theories of design. He says, "In sculpturing you don't have to worry if it looks natural. You can just make bumps and hollows, something . . . nice, is a good word for it." Eventually Mr. McKay would like to do bronze casting. In Montreal recently, he saw a display of bronze sculptures that excited him. As bronze casting is a difficult and costly procedure, he will introduce himself to sculpture with welded steel.

David McKay has been transferred around

New Brunswick several times in the past few years with his job as an engineer for York Steel. He finds it difficult to settle in to a new environment and for a long time in a new city he doesn't paint. In Fredericton he is the head of the engineering department, and although he enjoys his work, he is looking forward to the time when he can stop work and concentrate on painting.

McKay paintings are quickly increasing in value. When he is able to support himself and his wife on painting alone, Mr. McKay would like to study with Alex Colville. He has never before had formal lessons, excepting four assignments with the much advertised Norman Rockwell Famous Artist's School. This course cost him \$600. It was supposed to consist of twenty-four assignments done over a two-year period, but after four of these assignments, Mr McKay wanted no more. The reason for his dissatisfaction was brief, "They told you what to paint and it wasn't things I like to paint." He has got something out of the course however - a deluxe bound-in-gold set of art books, and some painrrushes. He does refer to the books for ideas when he confronts a particularly difficult problem in constructing a painting.

The McKays do not associate much with the artistic community in Fredericton and Mr. McKay has no one in particular he discusses his work with. He says he likes to work out his own problems in art, but he'd like more time to do it. He hopes to exhibit outside the province very soon. If the paintings receive as much attention outside of the province as they have had here, then it won't be long before David McKay is a professional painter.



Photo by Ken De Freitas

OPEN DOOR acrylic on masonite 34" x 30"

by Stuart Smith

Magic Realism is the term most often applied to work like this painting of Dave McKay's.

The "realism" part must be clear enough to any viewer. Here we have a scene which is realistic in that the artist has portrayed a shed door and the landscape beyond in terms that are unmistakably tangible. His intention has been to present the texture of the grass beyond. Realism in this context means the recapturing or creation of physical experience; from life.

The "magic" element refers to the poetry of the moment, to the emotion engendered by the scene. In architecture there is a phenomenon known as associative value. It

may not be a valid design principle to follow but it is undeniably a part of the layman's appreciation of a building. It is what makes some of us think that a bank should be Classical or a church Gothic. A building is judged a success insofar as it succeeds in looking the way it should. In a similar way the magic realist painter works with those ideas that we attach to landscape or to the objects of life. Feelings of abandonment, of nostalgic sadness, these are the stock in trade of the Magic Realist. As with associative values in architecture this may not be the firmest ground on which to erect a work, but it provides an undeniably popular and worthwhile experience for the majority of viewers.

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