

William Kurelek and Jahan Maka at the Canada House gallery

B Jahan Maka
 Untitled
 no date

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he travelled the length and breadth of Canada seeking to evoke the monumental grandeur of its landscapes. There is an emotional intensity in much of his work which is tinged with either innocent nostalgia or apocalyptic vision.

During his stay in England, Kurelek became a convert to Roman Catholicism, so there is also a strong religious element in many of his paintings. He believed that his artistic ability was God-given and must therefore be used in God's service. 'Paintings may not have nearly the power to convert people that the printed or spoken word has,' he wrote, 'but each man has his part to play in the human and divine drama - some persons just a few lines, others whole pages.'

B Jahan Maka
 Villagers Stroll Through
 the Park Seeking the Yacht
 Club - 1985
 coloured pencil, chalk,
 thinned paint on mat board,
 45.8 x 81.2
 Collection: Susan Whitney



Photo: Dunlop Art Gallery

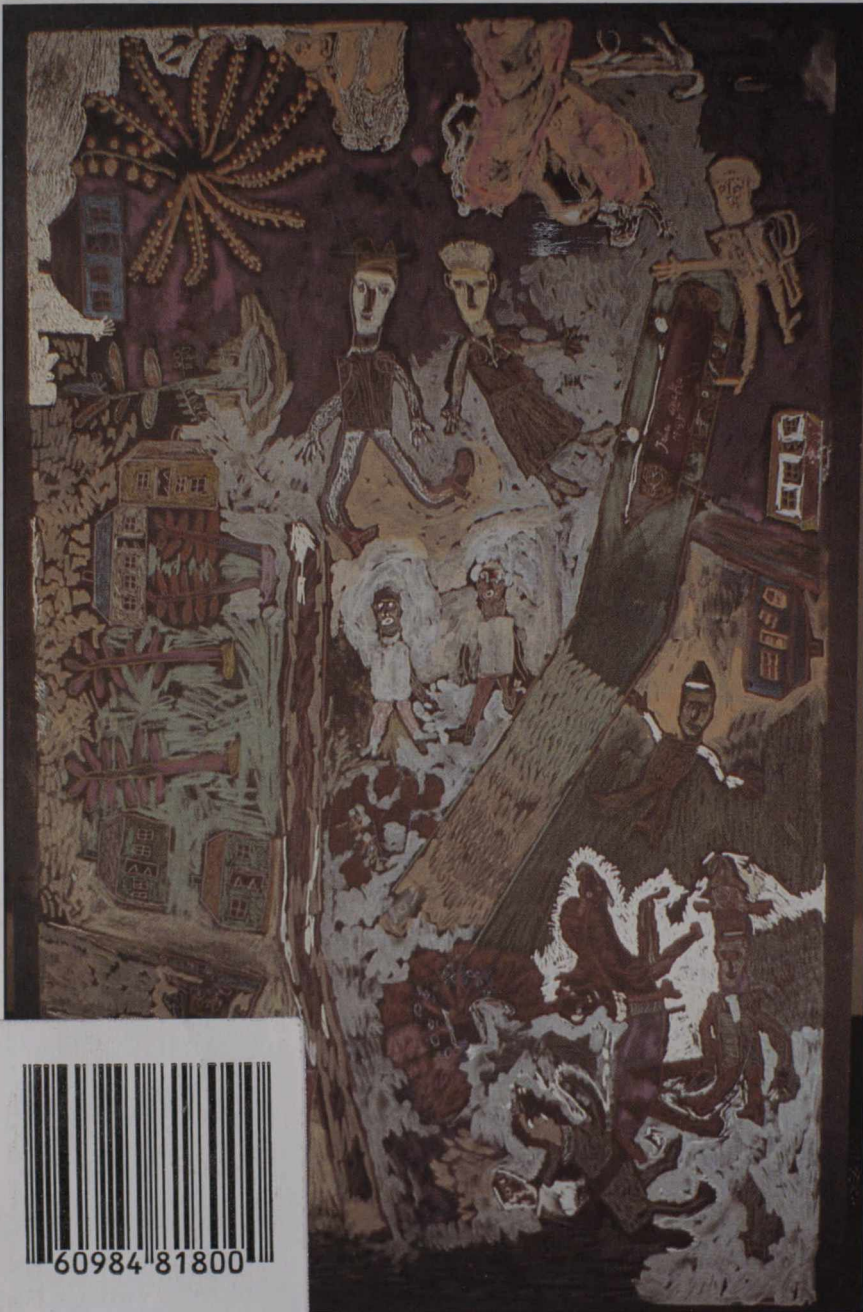


Photo: Dunlop Art Gallery

First prize

Kurelek died of cancer at the age of 50. Jahan Maka, on the other hand, lived to the age of 87 and did not take up art until he was in his late sixties. Born in Lithuania in 1900, he emigrated to Canada in the 1920s and worked as an itinerant labourer for ten years before becoming a miner with the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co.

Maka was encouraged to paint by his godson, the painter Tony Allison. His first attempts at painting and drawing were childlike in their simplicity, with figures and animals drawn on plain backgrounds. 'There is little in these early works that anticipates the complex formal and expressive synthesis of symbols that Maka would achieve in his late mature style,' writes art critic Michael Hall.

In 1977 Maka was persuaded to enter an art competition at which his work *Cranberry Portage Day 1975* won first prize. Two solo exhibitions followed and the art world began to take notice, especially when Maka evolved a more complex style in the early 1980s. During this period his backgrounds competed for attention with the figures in the foreground, and he began to build his pictures from multiple perspectives.

During the last three years of his life he produced his most original and moving works using chalk, crayon and paint on large sheets of dark brown and black paper and board. 'In the black pictures,' says Michael Hall, 'the artist achieved a condition of drama that seems to have suited his charged sense of memory and his distilled sense of the way simple anecdotes and complex myths intertwine.'

Though Kurelek and Maka may seem worlds apart in subject matter, technique and inspiration, their best work is imbued with a personal vision which is always intense and sometimes disturbing.

