

# ART PAINTER MEDIUM TOM FORRESTALL



Photo by Ken De Freitas

behind a table full of the easel in his studio-family room.

some sketches, combined with his feeling at a hitch-hiker exemplified this past summer so many transient youth.

The major effort resulting from these sketches is a small board with the hitch-hiker, back towards us and thumb up, in the right foreground and, in contrast, a tractor in the left background. The two set up a striking contrast.

"The tractor belongs to an old bachelor in Jugerville. If you go into it the story becomes very complex. The story unfolds for him. He wishes that old tractor. There is a great deal of him. Delightful."

It has been a struggle for Tom Forrestall to reach his goal of becoming a professional artist. He has worked designing labels for canned beans. At one time he drew cartoons for Fredericton's daily newspaper, "The Daily Leader", a job which he both enjoyed and excelled in. He also tried teaching art classes and he confesses that he is a poor teacher and doesn't enjoy it.

The Forrestalls originally came to Fredericton when Mr. Forrestall was offered a job at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Mr. Forrestall only stayed at the gallery for a few months because he found the working pace of Lord Beaverbrook hard to keep up with. He recalls,

"I came here to work for Lord Beaverbrook, to work at the art gallery. He hired everybody to work at the gallery, but he is an impossible person to work for. He worked all day and all night seven days a week and he expected you to keep up with him. I worked from eight thirty in the morning till ten o'clock at night, mostly doing records and babysitting oil paint-

ings that were two or three hundred years old. I had no time to do anything else, to paint. I understand now; he was working for himself. I work all the time now that I am working for myself."

The paintings of this period were dashed off in the few leisure hours Mr. Forrestall had to paint. Even as recently as 1962, Tom Forrestall was painting sort of abstract expressionist paintings, remarkably different from his realistic paintings of today. But as he explains, there just wasn't time to do anything else. Now he feels that he has found the technique best suited for what he is trying to say in his work. He explains,

"One can communicate something with this style. A lot of non-objective art does not communicate the way art should. It doesn't totally get across; it has a limitation and the limited side is too much.

"Art for a long time has gone along in a very independent way. It never gave a hoot in hell for the average person. It doesn't communicate to everybody. Some of the greatest art that we have is designed for everybody. Art of the Renaissance was designed so that anybody and everybody could get something from it. If it doesn't do that I think it's in a half vegetable state that just sits there."

Tom Forrestall's paintings are very direct and designed for everybody. As he continues,

"The subject of my paintings is very simple; they are complicated in the way they are painted. I would hope the message is not very complicated, that people don't need any explanation to go along with it. Really paintings have to do without that, people have to like it.

"In my painting, everything is directly related to memories of years ago; things I liked and things I didn't like."

Central to Forrestall's realism is the medium he paints in. He works in the ancient medium of tempera, applied to one quarter inch masonite boards. "Tempera", says Mr. Forrestall, "is very much suited for my type of painting. It is very delicate, but it has a character all its own. It fascinates me. Its ridiculously simple and very old. Temperas done a thousand years ago are still with us. Tempera is very, very permanent. Tempera is easily the most durable medium useful for picture painting.

"Tempera is restricted in size to about five or six feet in either direction. Oil fills any size frame. In a big art gallery a tempera painting is almost lost. A tempera would be lost beside a bright abstract painting. It has a delicacy that can be upset by something like that. It's not a rugged sort of thing in many ways.

"It's a little more complicated to get it ready. You separate the eggs and with a little water mix the yolks with pure pigment. The

**'I can't avoid colour but I feel it only gets in the way.'**

yolk is the binder that holds the pigment on the panel.

"When the pigment is applied to the panel it dries to touch almost immediately. Over a period of five or six years it dries right through and gets this transparent effect - so the picture actually improves with age.

"Tone is the vital thing in tempera; you try to get that balance of tones. Colour is a very subtle thing. You don't get the same redness as you get in oil.

"I use tempera for the effect you get without varnishing it; you have the whole character of tempera. With varnish, the varnish becomes a thing in itself. There is no real character of the paint."

Since the beginning of his development in art, Tom Forrestall has been sculpturing. In many ways the sculptures are radically different

from the pictures. If a painting has people in it at all, it is usually one solitary figure. The sculptures are often of crowds and people moving in mass. He sculpts chairs with splendid legs and bicycles with splendid spokes.

With the sculptures, Mr. Forrestall collects sketches of ideas and in periods of about every six months he spends a week at a local machine shop where he completes twelve to fifteen sculptures. Mr. Forrestall does the directing and the welder does the work. The sculptures are sort of a hobby while the painting is the real work. He says,

"The sculptures don't have that very personal thing that the paintings have. The sculptures are dashed off, done in a rather easy going manner. They're more fun to do. It's not great fun to do a painting. It's damned hard work. It's serious business.

"I spend several weeks on a painting. Nobody bothers to spend weeks painting a picture nowadays. A great deal of painting today lacks a type of discipline. But I've got to put the time in if I want to get the thing done this way.

"I enjoy painting. You have to enjoy it to do it, and you've got to do a lot of it. You've got to produce. You can't have any romantic ideas about it. But you have that independence. I could never go back to working for someone else. I'm ruined for that."

Besides the small table sculptures, Tom Forrestall has done a few large sculptures. The federal building in Antigonish has two large sculptures, and he did a huge, twenty-five foot high, sculpture for the Atlantic Provinces pavilion at Expo 67. This latter sculpture is mostly welded steel and was designed to stand through two floors. It is now the property of the University of New Brunswick, but there is difficulty in finding a suitable place for it.

Former UNB president, Dr. Colin McKay, wanted it to stand in the centre of the courtyard by the library, but when it was brought down from its storage place near the Central Heating Plant, it was found that sufficient support could not be given to it at that situation. A suitable place is still being sought for it.

Tom Forrestall has just completed a week of sculpturing in preparation for an exhibition of his work to be shown at the Cassal Galleries in Fredericton starting November 15. He has already had one one-man show in Fredericton this year - a retrospective exhibition at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery last September, showing his work over the last seven or eight years. There are also plans in the offing for an exhibition in Toronto in the spring of 72. Many galleries have offered to show Forrestall paintings but most he refuses until he has seen the gallery and knows it will give his work a suitable showing. In Canada he deals with the Roberts' Gallery in Toronto, the

Klincoff Gallery in Moncton, The Morrison Gallery in St. John and the Neate Gallery in Halifax. In the United States, the Hammer Gallery in New York sell Forrestall paintings. He thinks he may be a little outclassed in the Hammer Gallery because,

"Hammer buys a Monet for \$100,000. What does he care about a guy in New Brunswick, someone like myself just starting out?"

The Forrestalls are considering moving to England for a year and if they do Mr. Forrestall will try to find a gallery in London to handle his work.

Tom Forrestall's paintings seem to be so concerned with the scenery of the Maritimes and Maritime life, that it is hard to imagine what the impact of England on his work could be. It would certainly be very interesting to find out.