



Painting, sculptures, carvings, silver, bead and quill works by more than 20 contemporary Ojibway, Cree and Iroquois artists are now on display in a new gallery room at

the McMichael Canadian collection at Kleinburg. Shown is an acrylic by Norval Morrisseau. The gallery opened Sunday.

New gallery for Indian art

By Marilyn McDonald

Clifford Maracle is a man with a sense of humor and a witty tolerance of dumb questions.

"When did you start to paint, Cliff?" "Right after I bought the paints," he replied. He's also an impressive artist. One of the "more than a score of contemporary Indian artists" whose paintings, sculptures, carvings, and silver, bead and quill work form the 1,000 square foot Woodland Indian Gallery which opened Sunday as part of the McMichael Collection in Kleinburg.

Maracle's massive, brooding Blue Indian sits in quiet contemplation at the heart of the native painters' exhibit.

"I told them if it couldn't be in the centre they couldn't have it," Maracle joked. He was obviously pleased, proud and excited.

"Actually it was too heavy to hang on any other wall," commented one of Maracle's friends.

"It is the wall," teased Bunny Sicard. Ms. Sicard is executive assistant to Jim Buller, Director of the Association for Native Development in Performing and Visual Arts.

"The collection is very good," said Ms. Sicard. Many of the works had been shown in the Native Arts Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Pull Strings
At the public ceremony to open the newest gallery in the McMichael Collection, Ontario Minister of Culture and Recreation Robert Welch spoke alternately in French and English as he invited their Excellencies Governor-General Jules Leger and Madame Leger to assist in "an official pulling of strings."

The crowd packed the length of the hall as Canada's Governor-General pulled the white cord on the blue drapery to officially open Woodland Indian gallery dedicated to "native painters and craftspeople."

The official party was first to enter the gallery. Flashbulbs popped and cameras whirred as artists recognized by the security team were ushered through the throng.

"It's their gallery," explained one attendant apologetically.

Could a member of the press get a closer look? "No," came the terse reply of Edith Rennie, one of the "girls in green" as they became known to the subdued but restless crowd.

Tight security
Security was tight. Many visitors were either unaware of the ceremony or unaware it would hamper their free roam of the various galleries.

Two art lovers tried to explain they "just want to get upstairs" to another gallery. They were asked to wait.

"Isn't that disgusting," said Mack Sloan chuckling cheerfully at his fellow artist's apparent popularity.

"I can't even get up to my own gallery."

A sampling of Sloan's successful oils and watercolors, including the moody Misty Blue has been with the McMichael Collection since September and continues on public show through December.

Resplendent in a golden tan leather jacket with Cree bead-work, Heinz Hoefig was another patient patron of Indian art.

His fascination began in Germany over 20 years ago as he played "cowboys and Indians" with a commercially successful toy similar to the British toy soldier.

Inspired by Karl May, a writer well-known in Germany for his stories about North American Indians he came to Canada.

Hoefig is now "interested in limited edition prints" of native Indian art for The Tamarack, an outlet for native art and handicrafts in Midland, Ontario.

Eventually the VIP's moved on and the crowd moved forward into the bold, brilliant, psychedelic splash of the contemporary collection.

From the sensitive, mature work of Daphne Odjig to the strong stone sculpture of Iroquois carvers such as Jacob Thomas and his sons, a brilliant kaleidoscope of Woodland Indian contemporary art has found a home in a major provincial art gallery.

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