

Group of Seven original donated

Local man, artist Casson join to save peaks

By BRUCE ETHERIDGE
Group of Seven painter A.J. Casson and Unionville artist Paul Gauthier are teaming up to help preserve one of Canada's most distinctive natural phenomenon — white quartzite mountains.

Under Mr. Casson's hand, Mr. Gauthier and Artisan Screen Print Ltd. are reproducing a never-before-displayed Casson watercolor into a limited edition silkscreen print.

The watercolor, entitled The Entrance to Baie Fine, depicts a most unusual area on Manitoulin Island. Mountains of snow-white quartzite rock jut out of the landscape — as high as 1,000 feet. The quartzite is what remains of a mountain range older than the Rockies called the Cloche.

Mr. Casson painted the water-

color from the perspective of one of these quartzite peaks overlooking Frazer Bay. The scene depicts an inlet waterway meandering through the tree-green hills hued in blues and violets with dashes of quartzite outcroppings.

But ironically, the site's unique composition may be its downfall. A mining company — Indusmin Ltd. — wants to extract the white quartzite for the sand imbedded in the rock.

Indusmin Ltd. plans to melt the quartzite down to extract the sand. Although sand can be found almost anywhere, glass-making companies covet sand extracted from quartzite because of its purity. It produces top-notch glass at economical costs.

The 89-year-old surviving member of Canada's illustrious Group

of Seven approved the reproduction of the watercolor to help raise funds to save the Baie Fine area from the proposed mining development.

With Mr. Casson's permission, the founder of the North Channel Preservation Society, Stewart David Cork, is having 250 prints of the Baie Fine watercolor made. The painting was given to Mr. Cork's mother by Mr. Casson. It has been in the Cork family's private collection for over 50 years.

The Baie Fine watercolor features the same area as Mr. Casson's famous White Pine oil painting which hangs in the McMichael Canadian Collection in Kleinburg.

Launched campaign

When Mr. Cork discovered there were plans to "take down" a 1,000-foot quartzite mountain which could be leveled within 20 years, he launched a campaign to save the area. For him, the painting has become a symbol for his fight. The very spot Mr. Casson painted is now a drilling site.

"It's a unique and startling area," Mr. Cork said. "The white quartzite is like snow. Moonlight reflecting off the mountains is bright enough to read from."

Famous artists

It's also startling to consider the artists who have chosen to paint there. Along with Mr. Casson, the quartzite mountains have been a favorite spot of A.Y. Jackson, Frank Carmichael, Arthur Lismer, Bruce Brown and Joachim Gauthier — Paul's father.

Paul Gauthier has known Mr. Casson since he was a boy. Mr. Gauthier's father, Joachim, painted with Mr. Casson and other members of the Group of Seven in Markham and in other parts of Ontario.

It was Paul Gauthier's task to translate the watercolor into a line drawing the actual size of the print — which is twice as large as the original watercolor at Mr. Casson's request.

Painting to print

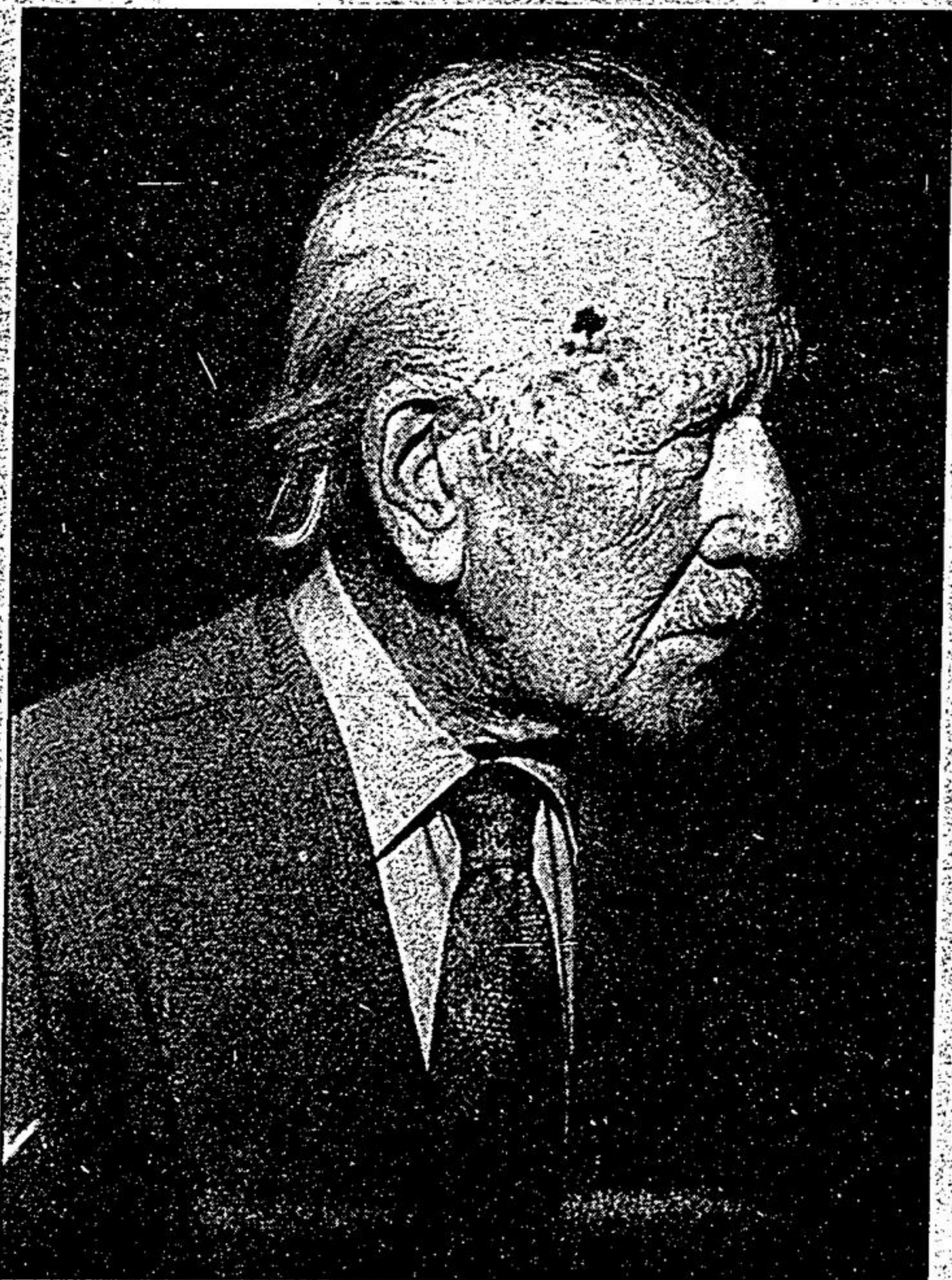
The original painting was broken down into colors — the Baie Fine print consists of 19 different colors — and then the colors into shapes. Screen stencils were made of the various shapes

and then the paint was laid down from lightest to darkest. Mr. Gauthier proofs the colors and the prints right from the original watercolor.

Mr. Gauthier likens the silkscreen print to a "translation" of the original painting into another language.

"An original is something you don't copy," Mr. Gauthier explains. "The print is itself unique."

"We all have covetous feelings," Mr. Cork said. "This is a chance for others to own a reproduction of a watercolor never before seen by the general public."



A.J. CASSON
Group of Seven artist



Unionville's Paul Gauthier (left) and Group of Seven artist A.J. Casson appraise the silkscreen print reproduction of a never-before-displayed Casson watercolor. The print will be available in April. Proceeds from the sale of the print will go toward saving a quartzite mountain range on Manitoulin

Island. Mr. Casson plans to resume painting this summer. He is recovering from major surgery. He wants to build up strength in his legs because he does all his painting standing up.

— Photos by Bruce Etheridge

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