

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, January 28, 2004

Canvas of War **February 21 to May 16, 2004**



Image: **Alex Colville** *Infantry near Nijmegen, Holland, 1946*, Canadian War Museum

Vancouver, BC – Canvas of War: Masterpieces from the Canadian War Museum opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery on February 21, the last scheduled appearance of the largest exhibition of work from Canada's extensive war art collection. Drawn from the distinguished collection of the Canadian War Museum, *Canvas of War* presents a wide range of perspectives on military conflict and demonstrates the importance of official war artists in representing and commemorating Canada's major contribution in the first and second world wars.

Consisting primarily of paintings, *Canvas of War* features members of the Group of Seven - A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, Lawren Harris, Frederick Varley – and notable Canadian artists including E.J. Hughes and Alex Colville. Bringing together a range of subject matter, styles and approaches the exhibition also includes work by Eric Aldwinkle, Cyril Barraud, Bruno Bobak, Molly Bobak, Alex Colville, Charles Comfort, Maurice Cullen, William MacDonnell, Alfred Munnings, Rowley Murphy, William Ogilvie, James Quinn and Norman Wilkinson. In total, over 60 works will be exhibited that, for the most part, have been kept in storage and not displayed since production.

It is a little-known fact that Canada was the first nation to send artists to the front lines to capture for posterity the experiences of war. While the events and experiences of war have been recorded in history, memoirs, literature and photography, the eyes of the artist presents a unique view that range from grandiose depictions of heroic events to intimate interpretations of the horror of the battlefield. *Canvas of War* traces a history of Canada's involvement in two world wars and underscores the role of official war art programs in the development of Canadian art as a whole.

“*Canvas of War* reaches beyond merely illustrating military experience. It provides a unique view of Canadian history and includes several powerful statements about the anguish and power of war,” said Ian Thom, Senior Curator, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Two interwoven themes, art as a record of war, and war as a catalyst for art, are explored in this exhibition. During World War I, war artists recorded scenes of heroic battles, hospital corps and soldiers in action, revealing the confused and powerful emotions of wartime. During World War II, they played a more active role in determining how the war was documented. This resulted in a more personal vision of the conflict, one that records the horrors of the front line but is also interested in recording day-to-day activities of soldiers eating in the mess hall, heading to base camp on the train, playing cards or assisting refugees. Like the soldiers they depicted, Canada’s war artists witnessed comrades and family die, suffered through deafening bombardments and survived inhumane conditions.

The impact of the world wars acted as a catalyst for Canadian artists and provided the source of much of the iconography associated with their later art. In Europe, Canadian war artists were exposed to Modernist art and nationalistic tendencies. Painting the war-torn landscape of the front, these artists, including those who would later form the Group of Seven, prepared themselves for a new approach to painting in Canada – one that unflinchingly sought to capture the desolation and harsh beauty of the Canadian landscape.

During *Canvas of War*, and in conjunction with the exhibition *The Divine Comedy*, a series of discussions will be held from January to April that ask the questions: How do the arts represent war, conflict and social change? What roles do the arts and art museums play in framing and shaping cultural memory around these events and changes? These discussions will be held at the Gallery as part of The Philosophers’ Café series and will explore the ways the arts and arts institutions document, interrogate and memorialize conflict and change.

The Canadian War Museum's war art collection consists of over 13,000 works, including paintings, watercolours, drawings, prints and sculpture. It encompasses both the Canadian War Memorials of the First World War and the Canadian War Records of the Second World War. The Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program Collection, which focuses on peacekeeping by Canadian Forces, completes the collection.

The Canadian War Museum is affiliated with the Canadian Museum of Civilization and holds the most extensive collection of military art in Canada. The core of the collection, established 123 years ago, includes works from the world wars as well as other conflicts in which Canada played a military role. The timing of this national touring exhibition coincides with the construction of a new Ottawa venue for the Canadian War Museum, due to open to the public in May 2005.

Canvas of War: Masterpieces from the Canadian War Museum will be on display at the Vancouver Art Gallery until May 16, 2004. The exhibition was curated by Laura Brandon. In Vancouver, the exhibition is co-ordinated by Ian Thom, Senior Curator, Historical, Vancouver Art Gallery. *Canvas of War* is organized and circulated by the Canadian War Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization with the generous support of the Donner Canadian Foundation.

- end -

When: February 21 to May 16, 2004

Where: Vancouver Art Gallery
750 Hornby Street
Vancouver BC V6Z 2H7
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

Hours: **Winter hours** cease April 5, 2004
Closed Mondays
Tuesday to Sunday & Holidays 10am to 5.30pm
Open Thursdays 10am to 9pm

Summer hours commence April 6, 2004
Open every day
Monday to Sunday & Holidays 10am to 5.30pm
Open Thursdays 10am to 9pm

Admission: Adults \$12.50, Seniors \$9.00, Students \$8.00, Children (12 & under) Free
Family \$30 (2 adults, 2 children, 13 years +), Thursday evening suggested donation \$5.00.

Media contact: Julie-Ann Backhouse
Communications Specialist
604 662 4722

Images: Digital images for professional media use only are available at the Vancouver Art Gallery's FTP site <ftp://ftp.vanartgallery.bc.ca>
Contact 604 662 4722 for password access.

Media Sponsors:



The Vancouver Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, the Government of Canada through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Program and the Greater Vancouver Regional District.