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Maurice Stubbs painted the door red at McIntosh Gallery; It and he made a difference



By Joe Belanger, The London Free Press
Wednesday, May 6, 2015 5:04:41 EDT PM



Maurice Stubbs, front, and his cousin Henry Stubbs sit in the McIntosh Gallery where Maurice's work is on display. The 90-year-old painter was the McIntosh Gallery's curator for 20 years. A book about his life and work, *Maurice Stubbs Intuitive Painter*, recently has been published.

It is only one red door.

But that door serves as a symbol of the intuitive legacy of Maurice Stubbs, the McIntosh Gallery's first full-time curator who helped transform it from an academic afterthought lost within the labyrinth of stone Gothic buildings and black doors of Western University to a vibrant, highly regarded public institution.

Stubbs' legacy neither begins nor ends at the red door he defiantly painted in the early 1980s, as a 167-page book about his life, art and impact on the Canadian art scene suggests.

Maurice Stubbs: Intuitive Painter will be launched Thursday at the gallery, a book that tells his story from his youth in Western Australia to his arrival in Canada. His art adorns almost every page.

"He's touched a lot of lives in London, as an artist and an administrator," said gallery director and curator James Patten, who penned the forward to the book.

"He did a lot to support Canadian and regional artists, making it a priority here. The other thing he did was he engaged the university community, the different faculties and the broader community outside."

The book, (\$40, available at Attic Books, Oxford Book Shop, DNA Artspace and online at brownanddixon.com) features essays by Western alumnus and Stubbs' protégé, Tom Smart, former director of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, McIntosh art curator Catherine Elliot Shaw and Phil McNamara, a West Australian writer, educator and artist.

The introduction was written by Henry Stubbs, a distant cousin of Maurice, who ignited the idea of a book after connecting with his long-lost relative while on a visit to Canada in 2001 at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"When I was in my teens I was told I had a relative who was an artist," said Henry, who lives in New Zealand where his branch of the Stubbs family has lived since the mid-1800s.

"I didn't know much about him, but I wanted to see him because I like art, although I'm not an artist. When he picked me up, it could have been my grandfather I was looking at, so I knew he wasn't an imposter."

Henry, a trade union official, returned to New Zealand and started to research his cousin, discovering that he'd won the prestigious Perth Prize in 1959 and was a member of the short-lived but celebrated Perth Group of artists that included the renown Guy Grey-Smith and Robert Juniper, a group who pioneered modernism not unlike the famed Painters Eleven in Toronto.

Realizing his cousin was a cut above the norm as an artist, Henry has returned to Canada for visits every year since 2012, initially to put together a catalogue of Maurice's work for the family archives.

That idea evolved into the book being launched Thursday.

Stubbs started studying art after serving nearly four years with the signal corps of the Royal Australian Air Force on a Pacific island. He moved to Canada in the late 1950s and studied at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, became assistant curator at London Public Library and Art Museum in 1962 then an education officer with the National Gallery of Canada in 1965.

In 1967, Stubbs led a touring exhibition of Canadian art to Australia. Less than two years later he accepted the position of full-time curator at the McIntosh.

During his 20 years at the McIntosh, Stubbs is credited with nurturing local and Canadian artists by establishing a program of exhibitions, putting together a catalogue of the University's art collection that was spread across the campus, guiding and developing its collections and establishing a museology course that has since evolved into a museum and curatorial studies program.

After retiring in 1989, Stubbs focused all his energy on his art, producing a large body of landscapes and abstract paintings in watercolour, oil and acrylics.

"If you get too involved, you don't have time to do what you want to do," said Stubbs about how his work as an artist was put on hold for 20 years before retiring.

"Then I had the time to think about these things and I could do it 24 hours a day if I wanted to and do what I liked and go where I wanted to go. It makes a difference in your whole outlook."

Curator and essayist Catherine Elliott-Shaw, one of Stubbs' graduates, said Stubbs shift to oil and acrylics later in his career "speaks to his versatility and masterful ability.

"Watercolour is such a difficult medium and to see how he was able to manipulate it for his own purpose and then (shift) to oil and acrylic in later years, it's a true tour de force."

joe.belanger@sunmedia.ca

IF YOU GO

What: Launch of the new book, Maurice Stubbs: Intuitive Painter, about the artist and his work as the McIntosh Gallery's first full-time curator.

Where: Western University, McIntosh Gallery.

When: Thursday, 2 p.m.

Admission: Free.

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