

## WE ARE SORRY



“TWO PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS SYSTEM WERE TO REMOVE AND ISOLATE CHILDREN FROM THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR HOMES, FAMILIES, TRADITIONS AND CULTURES, AND TO ASSIMILATE THEM INTO THE DOMINANT CULTURE. THESE OBJECTIVES WERE BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION ABORIGINAL CULTURES AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS WERE INFERIOR AND UNEQUAL. INDEED, SOME SOUGHT, AS IT WAS INFAMOUSLY SAID, “TO KILL THE INDIAN IN THE CHILD.”



TODAY, WE RECOGNIZE THAT THIS POLICY OF ASSIMILATION WAS WRONG, HAS CAUSED GREAT HARM, AND HAS NO PLACE IN OUR COUNTRY... THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA SINCERELY APOLOGIZES AND ASKS THE FORGIVENESS OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF THIS COUNTRY FOR FAILING THEM SO PROFOUNDLY. NOUS LE REGRETTONS. WE ARE SORRY.”

—Prime Minister Stephen Harper, June 11, 2008

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### 1960s

The photos on the previous pages are from the Yukon Archives. The records describe them as follows, left: "Young boys performing skit, 'Ten Little Indians' at David Lawson's going away party, 1964." Right: "Intermediate pupils hanging their stockings on Christmas Eve." These photos were taken at the Carcross Indian residential school, Carcross, Yukon, and given to the Yukon Archives by the Anglican Church who jointly operated the school with the federal government. Photo credits: Yukon Archives, Anglican Church, Discese of Yukon fonds 89/41 #707 (left) and #692 (right).

### 1970s

I have a particular interest in this school because after it was closed as an Indian residential school in 1970, it was transformed into the Carcross Community Education Centre. I attended this school 1974-75 when it was home

to 90 people who had re-imagined it as an alternative community and high school. Our vision was of a place of mutual respect and trust where First Nations and non-First Nations students, 'parent members' and staff would live together. During this period we talked about many things, but what the place had been like during the 15 years before it was an 'alternative school' wasn't part of the picture.

### Present

I was recently back in Whitehorse where I exhibited, *Sorry*, at the Yukon Arts Centre. (It was the fourth version of *Sorry*, previously shown at McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, 2005; Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax, 2005; and COFAspace, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney Australia, 2008.) For this exhibition I featured the two apologies made by Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd to the Australian Aboriginal people for the 'Stolen Generations' (Feb 13, 2008) and by Stephen Harper to Canada's First Nations for the Indian residential schools (June 11, 2008). While in Whitehorse I visited the Yukon Archives and looked at images from the Carcross Indian residential school. ■

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REVIEW BY TILA KELLMAN

## NATURAL PERSPECTIVE FENN MARTIN WITH NICHOLAS JOHNSON

*THE BACKROADS, HAY, TOOLS & CLAY.* ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, ANTIGONISH, JANUARY 6-FEBRUARY 8, 2009.

Fenn Martin's exhibition presented a vigorous and innovative interpretation of rural Nova Scotian life in the rarely seen medium of ceramic relief. Martin celebrated the lives of his neighbours, many of whom pursue several occupations simultaneously, such as farming, forestry and trucking, in the area around Antigonish. Martin is a carpenter as well as ceramist. The show also included pieces constructed from patterned tiles grouped around scenes painted on ceramics by Nicholas Johnson. The two achieved a remarkable integration of sensibility while playing off ceramic techniques against those of painting.

Martin's practice revitalizes a tradition of narrative relief elaborated in Roman work such as *Trajan's Column*

(113 CE) that already depicted scenes in semi-realist space. Renaissance artists, most notably Donatello, brought single-point perspective into narrative relief. With the triumph of the 20th-century International Style architecture, this decorative tradition fell into disuse and remains little practiced.

Avoiding both a false classicism and romantic sentimentality, Martin's expressively rugged modelling and space-warping compositions translate the effort and resourcefulness required to pursue a life that young people have been taught to denigrate for years. At the same time, these qualities intimate that life's precariousness. Up to 80 inches across and 32 inches high, Martin's compositions flow in two directions. Narrative unfolds across box-like sections from left to right, while spatial distortions and compressions play out in depth. His modelled scenes rising from rear planes of variable depth challenge perspectival flattening from "in back," while he augments the distortions of perspective when cutting into the block, so that carving inwards and modelling outwards with their sculptural and pictorial conventions meet and have a conversation. The perspectival angles and focus change from section to section, drawing viewers through zig-zagging spaces and abrupt changes of scale that add life and power to these narratives.