

# Diana Thorneycroft's Extraordinary Stories

CAUSTIC LANDSCAPES OF THE CANADIAN IMAGINARY

**May 11–September 9, 2011**

public preview: Tuesday, May 10, 5:30–8:30 p.m.

press preview: Tuesday, May 10, 11 a.m. | Limited access, booking essential: 01 44 43 21 48  
at 6:30 p.m., artist talk by Diana Thorneycroft, in english | Free public access



*Group of Seven Awkward Moments (Winter on the Don)*

The Canadian Cultural Centre presents the first exhibition of the work of the photographer Diana Thorneycroft in France. The artist will also be taking part in the group exhibition *My Winnipeg*, the first of a series of exhibitions about cities with innovative art scenes, which opens at the Maison Rouge/Fondation Antoine de Galbert in Paris on June 23. In *My Winnipeg*, the work of Diana Thorneycroft will be shown alongside that of artists who already have a presence in Europe, such as Guy Maddin, Marcel Dzama and the General Idea collective, as well as artists established in Canada, very prominent abroad, but little known in France, including Shary Boyle and Ken Monkman.

The exhibition at the Canadian Cultural Centre presents in its entirety the series *Group of Seven Awkward Moments*, twenty or so photographs that recently marked the Canadian art world (the magazine *Canadian Art* picked this series as one of the ten best exhibitions of 2008) and a selection of works from the older series, *The Canadiana Martyrdom Series*. Through a distinctive blend of genre paintings, landscapes, personal narratives embedded in historical narratives, and martyrdoms of plastic dolls, the exhibition gives a "disorienting" vision of Canada. *Diana*

*Thorneycroft's Extraordinary Stories* presents the uncommon, hybrid and iconoclastic image of a country reconstructed using fantasized scenes from a supposed collective imagination, an unrestrained imagination where true facts, customs, taboos and stereotypes clash. The artist plays with the sentiment of national identity and reveals its artifice. In her magnificent scenes of small industrial figurines, natural light is a visible lie that refers the viewer to a manufactured, ossified (tourist) world, emptied of substance but fascinating, domestic (reassuring) and amusing nevertheless. Thus, all the scenes are darker than they seem, despite the dazzling workmanship of these small spectacles in isolation.

In *Group of Seven Awkward Moments*, disasters, accidents and ambiguous scenes are used as backdrops for dioramas produced using the pictorial imagery of the famous Group of Seven. This group of painters-explorers, who endeavoured to depict the Canadian wilderness and whose number varied until 1931 (there were up to ten of them, not counting Tom Thomson, who died before the group was founded, but who was its inspiration), advocated the invention of a new style to break free once and for all of the European art that had pride of place in the museums of Canada. In the 1920s, their landscapes, painted with pure colours and large brushstrokes, aimed to represent a distinctive identity, evocative of a Canadian national sentiment.

Diana Thorneycroft reduced this ideal to a simple image, gave these works a "usefulness" by making them the backdrops of an unlikely and totally heterogeneous imagination. The wilderness idealized by the Group of Seven is paradoxically filled and sullied with awkward events. As for the martyrdoms of *The Canadiana Martyrdom Series*, their absurdity is in stark contrast to the trivialization of violence caused by the free circulation of images in the mass media. The fact that the martyrs are Canadian celebrities represented by toys adds to the apparent cynicism of the work. Diana Thorneycroft makes use of the viewer's attraction for idols and violence, and takes it to a caricatural travesty, the point where the cultural industry practises it "naturally".

Presented to a foreign public for the first time, these atypically Canadian scenes will, taken out of their national context, take on a new resonance. They call into question the exportation of a certain Canadian exoticism.

**Curator: Catherine Bédard | Promotion: Jean-Baptiste Le Bescam | Production: Centre culturel canadien**

Centre culturel canadien - Canadian Cultural Centre

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Access: Metro and RER: Invalides, Bus : 28, 49, 63, 69, 83, 93

Opening Hours:

Free access from Monday to Friday from 10:00AM to 6:00PM, Thursday until 7:00PM.



la maison rouge

AIR CANADA 

Canada 

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*Group of Seven Awkward Moments (Beavers and Woo at Tanoo)*



*The Martyrdom of St. Celine at the Canadiana Stampede*

Diana Thorneycroft lives and works in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has exhibited around the world, from Moscow to Sydney, and has held several solo and group exhibitions across Canada.

Some of the major group exhibitions in which she has taken part include: *Beau*, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa, 1992 (which then travelled in Canada and internationally); *Memory and History*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, 1993–94; *Search, Image and Identity: Voicing our West*, Finnish Museum of Art, Helsinki, 1993 (which then travelled to six Canadian cities, from Sackville to Kelowna, until 1996); *The Liminal Body*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2000; *Illegal Art*, Gallery 313, New York; SFMOMA, San Francisco; Nexus Gallery, Philadelphia, in 2002–03, then Pacific Northwest College of Arts, Portland, and Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, Florida, in 2006; *Not So Cute & Cuddly: Dolls & Stuffed Toys in Contemporary Art*, Ulrich Museum, Wichita, Kansas, 2003; *Darkside: Photographic Desire and Sexuality Photographed*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, 2008.

*Touching: The Self* is the first major exhibition that toured across Canada from 1991 to 1993, but the solo exhibition that really made Diana Thorneycroft known on the national scene was *Diana Thorneycroft: The Body, Its Lesson and Camouflage*, which was presented between 1999 and 2002, at the Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery, Medicine Hat, Alberta; Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario; The Nickel Arts Museum, Calgary; Agnes Etherington Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario; Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa; Embassy of Canada, Tokyo; Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and The Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, Manitoba. In 2003–04, the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery of the University of Toronto presented the series *Martyrs Murder* (which then travelled to Thunder Bay, Ontario, and Corner Brook, Newfoundland). *The Canadiana Martyrdom Series* was shown in Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa between 2005 and 2009. These series of the 2000s, as well as the famous series *Group of Seven Awkward Moments*, have been presented as part of several other solo exhibitions, including *Diana Thorneycroft's Canadian Moments: Awkward and Atrocious*, Carleton University Gallery, Ottawa (2010) and *Diana Thorneycroft: Canada, Myth and History*, which travelled to the following places between 2009 and 2011: McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario; The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg; The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford, Abbotsford, British Columbia; and the Windsor Art Gallery, Windsor, Ontario.

Diana Thorneycroft is the recipient of many awards from the Canada Council, the Manitoba Arts Council and the City of Winnipeg. Her work has been the subject of CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio and television documentaries. She is now recognized as a major figure of contemporary North American photography and was named one of the hundred most promising photographers of the new millennium in the publication *Blink* (Phaidon Press, 2002), which brought together the choices of ten of the most influential international curators.