

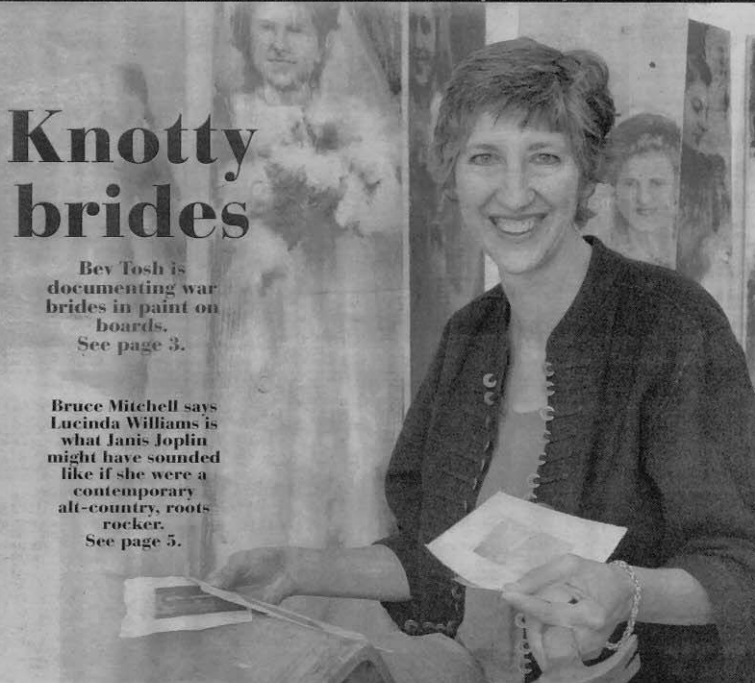
showcase

ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE & TV LISTINGS • July 14 to 20, 2005

Knotty brides

Bev Tosh is documenting war brides in paint on boards. See page 3.

Bruce Mitchell says Lucinda Williams is what Janis Joplin might have sounded like if she were a contemporary alt-country, roots rocker. See page 5.



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Poignant evocation of war-bride story

It's not often that I get teary eyed at an art exhibition, but Bev Tosh's exploration of the war-bride experience, *One-Way Passage*, poignantly evokes the collective history of a generation of women that hits close to home.

My mother was a war bride, one of thousands of young women swept up in the turbulent forces of history as Hitler rumbled across Europe and shiploads of fresh-faced Canadian farm boys landed on Britain's loggy shores.

My father was one of those lads, a shy but handsome blond-haired refugee from Czechoslovakia whose family had been resettled by the Canadian government on a homestead in northern B.C.

He met my mother on a park bench in London while the Canadian army was waiting to mobilize into France, and although family lore suggests my mother initially liked his dark-haired

friend better, my parents were soon courting.

They married in 1944 and, after the war, my mother, until then a cosseted middle-class girl, came to Canada on what was euphemistically known as a bride ship.

Like many of the more than 40,000 war brides who came to Canada, she was ill-prepared for the harsh realities of life in the Canadian wilderness. Tosh, a Calgary artist who has interviewed hundreds of war brides, says she has heard heart-rending stories of homesickness, isolation, struggles with in-laws and, at times, unremitting poverty.

"For all of them, that was the common denominator, the tears," says Tosh. "They said they could have sailed on the tears. They left everything they knew, everyone they knew - some never saw their parents again."

Quick hit
Who: Bev Tosh
What: *One-Way Passage*
Where: Kelowna Art Gallery, 1315 Water St.
When: To Sept. 18

The portraits are painted on sheets of plywood that Tosh leans against the gallery wall.

The plywood emphasizes the commonality and uniformity of the women's experiences as well as the unremarkable quality of their self-described ordinary lives as wives and mothers.

But each sheet is marked with unique wood grain patterns that allowed Tosh to exploit material idiosyncrasies to create images of individuals, helping her avoid sentimentality.

The project - now only in its second showing - has been an emotional journey for Tosh, the daughter of a war bride.

A monumental portrait of Tosh's mother hangs at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa as a tribute to women's wartime sacrifices, but she rarely talks about her experiences.

Tosh knows only that her mother married a flight instructor she met when he was training pilots in Saskatchewan and followed him to his home in New Zealand after the war.

Tosh, who came to Canada as a girl with her mother after her parents' marriage ended, began to research that history about five years ago when she was in New Zealand teaching a painting workshop.

A newspaper ran a story about her and she began talking to war brides.

"In collecting these other stories, I'm making my mother's story," she says.

Most war brides, like my mother, are now widowed and in their 80s.

As cultural critic Susan Sontag has said of photography, Tosh's images are both "a pseudo presence and a token of absence." Here the war brides take a last, bittersweet turn in their makeshift wedding finery, as sifting a symbol of the Canadian experience as a lone train whistle echoing through the prairie twilight.



Photo: Margaret White photo

eVent visual arts

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Bev Tosh's war-bride exhibition, *One-Way Passage*, is on display at the Kelowna Art Gallery.



Event art

Portia Priege