

War Brides: One-Way Passage

This exhibition presents the work of Bev Tosh, a Calgary-based contemporary artist who interprets some of the personal stories of women who married Canadian military personnel during and after the Second World War. These "war brides" are women she has met and corresponded with in Canada, England, New Zealand, and the United States. Their stories, of finding and sometimes losing love, represent the leap of faith taken by thousands in order to build lives far from home.

Between 1944 and 1947, 44,000 women came to Canada, alone or with their children, as the wives of Canadian military personnel. A further 1,000 came to Newfoundland and Labrador. This is the largest single immigration in Canadian history. Some 4,000 left Canada as the wives of foreign military men who had trained in Canada during the war. Today, close to one million Canadians are the descendants of war brides.

In 2001, Bev Tosh painted *One-Way Passage*, a monumental portrait of her mother Dorothy as a young war bride who emigrated from her native Canada to New Zealand. The portrait includes the names of ships on which many war brides had travelled. This painting was the direct catalyst for her ever-expanding and continuing research on war brides. The result can be seen in this fascinating exhibition which interweaves personal, social, historical and artistic elements. All the art is based directly on primary sources including hundreds of personal interviews, photographs, letters, personal memorabilia and period artifacts.



The exhibition's core is the series of individual bridal portraits based on original photographs of each young woman on her wedding day. Wherever possible, Tosh also used the naturally occurring knots and grain of the wooden boards on which she painted to emphasize her subjects' character and dress. They are positioned *Shoulder-to-Shoulder*, leaning together to suggest the war brides' mutual support. The paintings rest on blocks of wood

resembling railroad ties, in which Tosh has inscribed the names of the women's Canadian destinations.

Each war bride has recounted her story to the artist - a personal story about love and family, adaptation, endurance and identity. While the experiences of women are often overshadowed in the historical record, Bev Tosh shines a spotlight on ordinary women in extraordinary times.

"Bev Tosh is truly a visual poet who enriches our understanding of the past through an artistic sensibility that transforms the cold facts of distant history into a vivid, poignant and present reality." Monique Westra, Curator, Art