

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Back in the Old Days: Celebrating Harold Cromwell's Artistic Legacy of Humour and Wry Observation

ANNAPOLIS ROYAL, Nova Scotia (August 24, 2023) – Harold Cromwell (1919-2008) is a giant of Nova Scotia folk art and considered one of the most important folk artists in Canada. Even though he hasn't received the same level of recognition as others, a new exhibition of work by Harold Cromwell at ARTSPACE reintroduces the art world to an artist who has been somewhat eclipsed by his more famous peers, such as his near contemporary (and near neighbour), Maud Lewis.

Harold Cromwell was born in Weymouth Falls in 1919 and was descended from Black Loyalists who settled in the area in 1783. Born into a poor, hard-working family, Cromwell went to live and work with his uncle at a very young age. As a teenager, he worked at the Goodwin Hotel in Weymouth.

During the Second World War, Cromwell joined the army and served in England, supporting soldiers who suffered from combat fatigue. While recuperating in the military hospital at Debert from wounds he received overseas, Cromwell was given drawing materials by the nurses to help him pass the time. Cromwell soon started drawing the doctors and nurses, as well as the landscape he saw out the window. Drawing became a defining part of his life, much more than a simple pastime.

Working primarily with the humble materials of pencil and ball-point pen on plain white paper or wood, Cromwell was neither a painter nor a carver. For over 50 years, Cromwell, through his drawings, depicted memories, stories, and anecdotes of daily life, especially in the African Nova Scotian community of Weymouth Falls; his art looked back to an idealized Nova Scotian past, one of close-knit community and family life.

"Cromwell has a unique style and approach that sets him apart from other first wave folk artists, and by the 1990s, his work was regularly included in any survey of the genre," said Ray Cronin, former Director of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

"Cromwell's work depicts life in a rural community in the early twentieth century and is laced with humour and wry observation," adds Cronin.

For many years, Harold Cromwell was artist-in-residence at Upper Clements Park, and he sold his work at the Annapolis Royal Farmers' & Traders' Market. Much of his work is held in private collections, and to date, institutions have struggled securing the loans to mount exhibitions of his work, until now with the opening of *Back in the Old Days: The Art of Harold Cromwell*. ARTSPACE worked closely with Cromwell's daughters, Natasha and Clara, lending the works that will be in the exhibit. Harold's grandson, Karlon DeZylva-Adihetty assisted with selecting images for the exhibit.

"As a descendent of Cromwell, Karlon will also present his own paintings in an adjacent gallery. Joining Karlon will be Cromwell's other grandson, Phillip Bailey. Phillip is also an artist, and he will present select works he has created alongside Karlon's paintings," said Sophie Paskins, Gallery Director.

In 2017, Sissiboo Landing (Weymouth's Cultural and Interpretive Centre) hosted a Harold Cromwell Art Festival that featured a 30-minute video interview with Cromwell filmed prior to his death and will be shown as part of the exhibit.

"During the run of the exhibition, ARTSPACE is excited to host a Community Forum and hear stories and memories of Harold Cromwell and to discuss the historical significance of his life as a prominent African-Nova Scotia artist," said Ted Lind, ARTSPACE Board Member.

The forum will include members of his family (daughters and grandsons) and local residents who will be encouraged to attend. Ray Cronin has written text for an accompanying book and will attend the forum to provide perspective on Cromwell's work.

Back in the Old Days: The Art of Harold Cromwell opens September 9, 2023, and runs until October 28, 2023, at ARTSPACE Main Gallery with work by Harold's grandsons, Karlon DeZylva-Adihetty and Phillip Bailey, in the adjacent Library Gallery. Opening September 9, 11am - 2pm, followed by a community forum at 2 pm. All are welcome to attend, and those who have stories of Harold are encouraged to share.

Support for the project and associated programming provided by Arts Nova Scotia, Municipality of the County of Annapolis, Town of Annapolis Royal, The Parker Mountain Wind Turbine Association.

ARTSPACE is a public Art Gallery that is operated by the Annapolis Region Community Arts Council, a registered charitable, community organization dedicated to encouraging and promoting the arts. Supported through the Province of Nova Scotia and the Canada Council for the Arts.

ARTSPACE Gallery is located at 396 St. George Street in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia

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