Two points, one home

The Canadian-Hungarian artists in 'Re:InSitu' at the Saint John Art Centre share a past and an 'incredible connection to Canada.' Story by Sean Flinn

Being in situ, or in place, means living between two points: interior and exterior, here and there, past and present, young and old or individual and community. This is the conceptual zone explored, or space occupied, by the visual artists and filmmakers in Re:InSitu, on display until Jan. 8 at the Saint John Art Centre. The program comprises two parts: the Canadian-Hungarian artist Anna Torma, by phone from Béke Verte, near Pécs, where she lives and works. Torma curates Re:InSitu with Mary Keccan-Ehos, an artist based in Burlington, Ont. Keccan-Ehos composes "domestic materials," such as food and textiles, in her art and describes the entire exhibition as a "c vast tapestry." Diverse practices are represented in Re:InSitu, including photography, film and video, fibre art, painting, drawing, collage, printmaking, sculpture and multimedia. Torma points out the ages of the participating artists range broadly, too, from 26 to 80 years old. Memory of Hungary — its historical shifts, such as the 1956 popular uprising against Soviet occupation — are fragmented for some, whole for others. Yet, Torma says, everyone is working in the present: "There are very contemporary ideas in medium and approach." Torma, a Strathbogie Award-winning textile artist, studied in Hungary but left the country some 20 years ago. She established her international reputation while in Canada. She combines her own work with contributions in sculpture, painting, drawing and collage from her family husband Istvan Zsako and sons Ballint and David Zsako. The resulting installation, called Critical Mass, involved a return to Hungary. "Creating a collaborative work in Hungary would demonstrate the tensions and inspirations of our old and new life," Torma writes in her catalogue statement about the work. The Zsako men contribute individual works to Re:InSitu as well. István, known mainly as a sculptor, shows recent painting and drawing work. Ballint presents drawings, which can be viewed at www.balintseko.com. His brother David offers a series of photographs called Limited Memory. Heather White Brittain, executive director of the Saint John Art Centre, has observed an "incredible connection to Canada" underlying the art. And, she adds, a particular attachment to New Brunswick and other parts of Atlantic Canada. "They've been moved by the landscape and warmth of the people," she says. For example, there's Andrea Bianar, the Hungarian-born president of the Canadian-Hungarian Artists Collective. Bianar, a Montreal-based artist who founded the Tantrum Arts Symposium, spends summers on the Bay of Fundy. She draws inspiration from the mudflats and saltmarshes of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (as seen in Re:InSitu and elsewhere), says White Brittain. "Most of the community is Montreal-based," Torma acknowledges. Re:InSitu has shown in that city, and two locations in Hungary, already. Torma and husband István Zsako wouldn't trade their home for a bigger, busier place. "It's clean, spacious and very quiet," she says. "It's a great workplace." Sek

Andrea Bianar's 2008 triptych on paper, 'Procession.' PHOTO SUBMITTED

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Andrea Bianar's 2008 mixed-media on board, "Marsh Muse." PHOTO SUBMITTED