

decision to not loan the company money. But Böggild says Eastern Front is now pursuing other funding plans, including the quest for a corporate sponsor for its next play about young love cut tragically short during World War One. Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding* is currently in rehearsal and set to open on March 17. ▣

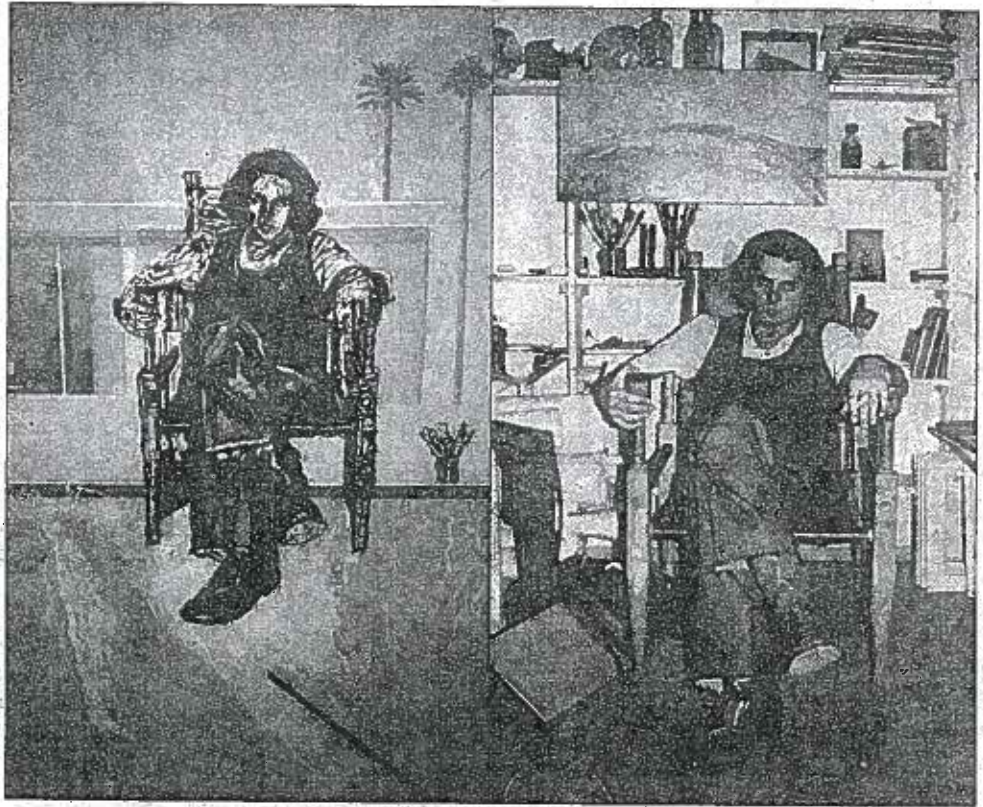
Romanian debt

Mathew Reichertz paints a memorial to a 1979 art tragedy. Jane Kansas remembers.

Mathew Reichertz's *Romanian Debacle* show at the Khyber is great. The 68 paintings, mostly small, a few large, demonstrate that he can really lay down paint, and no matter what else is going on in a painting, the laying down of the paint is first. The greatest, most heartfelt artistic intention falls into mess if there's no practice to back it up. The opposite is even more grievous: Much technique and no bodily fluid makes for dull illustration and non-art.

Reichertz brings both technique and heart to his painting, so a walk around *Romanian Debacle* visiting this work is a pleasant voyage. It's all good to look at: varied layerings of paint, huge portraits, tiny bright cels. It turns out this is a political show, or at least a show of memorial, so there's a back story. The problem with didactic, political art is when the mission, medium and message get tangled up and their McLuhanian tusseling doesn't move the art forward. The art must come first. Which it does here.

So yes, you can go look at the show, and just have a good encounter with paint, or you can explore what Reichertz is showing and preserving. In 1979 a show of 68 paintings by eight Romanian artists was on its way to Saint Mary's University Art Gallery. The work was on a world tour and when the crates arrived in Halifax from Mexico they were left for six days on the tarmac at the airport. It poured cats and dogs and when the 16 crates finally got to the gallery they were leaking so much water they had to be removed to the hall outside. The paintings suffered grievous dam-



Painting a picture Mathew Reichertz's interpretation (left) of the original Horia Bernea photo. photo Ryan Whyntott age. A diplomatic incident ensued.

Two years ago Reichertz, as program director for Saint Mary's, was organizing the archive of exhibit catalogues when he came across the catalogue for *8 Romanian Painters*. The story of the paintings, the terrible mistakes and neglect that left them on the tarmac in the rain and the loss to the individual painters set him on the road to producing this large piece, these 68 paintings.

The eight large paintings are each portraits of the Romanians, their images taken from those in the catalogue. Although very well-known in Romania and in Europe, their names are mostly unknown and unpronounceable to us. Reichertz has moved them into a more familiar canon for us by referencing, overtly or subtly, names and styles we can relate to. Thus Horia Bernea, born in 1938, graduate of the Pedagogic Institute in Bucharest, is in the catalogue photographed as a seated glowering stud in his studio. Reichertz paints him, still in his chair, suspended above David Hockney's "A Bigger Splash" swimming pool. (Watch for water throughout the show.) The portrait of Sabin Balasa reminds us of Chuck Close; Ion Gheorghiu of Gerhard Richter.

Then the 60 small paintings start with the elements of the story—rain, tarmac, weather—and ripple out, as the thoughts of a painter would in looking at something, to his mother, the critic, the gallery director. Always to other water: water lilies, waves. The 60 paintings chart the six days of tarmac abandonment but because of hanging concerns are in only five groups. Patterns still emerge. The title tags are more like scene titles on a DVD: a completely abridged and condensed version of the story. The small paintings are cute, and it turns out there are only eight variation of size and shape, patterned on the eight illustrations of Romanian paintings in the 1979 catalogue.

But without the catalogue and the article by Sheila Cole in the Winter/Spring 1980 issue of *Arts Atlantic*, a viewer won't know too much of this. Photocopies of them should be in the gallery. There is a small 'plaque' posted but more information would have been better. Knowing the history gives one a keener eye with which to see *Romanian Debacle*, but since it is good painting, as long as the heart is keen that's all you really need. ▣

Romanian Debacle at the Khyber Centre for the Arts, 1588 Barrington, until March 20. Reichertz gives a presentation on Tuesday at 7pm.

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