

TORONTO STAR, by Francine Kopun
Tuesday, November 4, 2008

A10 • TORONTO STAR • TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2008
GREATER TORONTO > THE CITY SEEN

LEST WE FORGET

Art that makes you think

Two giant toy soldiers, one standing, one fallen, are the focus of the city's latest public art. Monument to the War of 1812, unveiled yesterday, is the work of Vancouver artist/author Doug Coupland, who discusses war and remembrance in emails with reporter **Francine Kopun**

FROM DOUG
TO: KOPUN, FRANCINE

Hi there.
My dad was in the Canadian Air Force (not the Armed Forces ... he's picky on that one) and so I grew up surrounded by military objects and imagery everywhere: coats, weapons, pictures of my father flying jets and on and on. Growing up, Nov. 11 was a huge deal and I get ambled on the subject quickly.
A few years ago I was on a train in England on Nov. 11 and suddenly the train stopped halfway inside a tunnel and everyone went silent for two minutes and it was a haunting experience for me, as if everyone died and their souls were collectively agreeing to go to heaven. It was like time stopped. And then the train started again and life resumed but it was different because of that small moment. I think Nov. 11 is a day when everyone, to some degree, harmonizes with everyone else in the best possible way.
Doug



Writer Doug Coupland's father, Doug Sr., was a member of the Canadian Air Force.

FROM KOPUN, FRANCINE
TO: DOUG

What did your family do on Remembrance Day?
DC: In general there's an unofficial dinner at my parents' place, poppies mandatory and Dad talks about his military experiences and old friends. Most of them are gone now and so there's a wistful side to things. Dad's 83 — he lived every moment of military life.

FK: Do you remember what you thought of it then?
DC: My earliest war memories are of Vietnam on the CBC news on this ancient E!TV in the living room. I remember that it never seemed to be going well. Even in kindergarten you could sense that it was a useless stupid war.

FK: How long should society continue to honour Nov. 11?
DC: Always. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and we must remember old wars to diminish vigilance.

FK: Do you think there's any chance some veterans might regard the sculpture as lacking in gravitas?
DC: I don't think so. I think it's



Monument to the War of 1812 was unveiled yesterday at the corner of Lake Shore Blvd. and Bathurst St.

pretty obvious what the piece says. Yes, it's partially about war in the abstract, but it's also a reminder to remember who might not be fully aware of the importance of the War

of 1812 to our history. It's also built to get people to ground see Fort York (where, BTW, you quickly learn how short people used to be in 1812).

Much there and far away mean Q's if you like.

Doug

FROM DOUG
TO: KOPUN, FRANCINE

Yup, I'll be at the unveiling. The event itself will be on the short side (old out) and afterwards I donate some model muskets to Fort York inside the building's lobby.
To more IMPORTANT subjects

FK: You say "It's pretty obvious what the piece says." What do you think it says?

DC: I guess what I want to happen is for people to walk/drive/ride by and see these figures and say, "What the heck is going on here," and then maybe they'll stop and come over and see the figures in relationship to each other. And then they'll find out what they are and what they represent. The piece isn't so much an anti-war statement as it is a reminder of a) that there was once a War of 1812 when the Americans tried to take Canada and lost, b) Toronto exists because of this war, c) Canada exists because of this war, d) there are people out there trying to (literally) rewrite history to make it look like the U.S. didn't lose



Doug Coupland at Fort York with members portraying the Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada.

and, e) why not take a stroll over to Historic Fort York, a trip rendered extra-corny by the presence of the Gardians.

FK: As the author of books of war in Canadiana (Guns of Canada), what do you think is our most iconic statement on war?

DC: There's a photo of the synchro-

in in WWI that I've never been able to shed from my mind. It's from the National Gallery. I think and has no copyright.

FK: What do you think of the red poppy game?

DC: Please, dear God, can someone invent a better pin so that they don't always fall off in the first three

minutes? And I remember they used to be three-colored growing up. How hard is it to add a touch of green to it? It's as if they're taking pride in their craftsmanship we're forgetting something.

Doug

NOT YOUR TYPICAL WAR MEMORIAL

Monument to the War of 1812 comprises two giant toy soldiers, a standing member of the 101st Royal Newfoundland Regiment and a fallen American soldier from the 16th Infantry Regiment, who would have fought each other on April 27, 1812, when U.S. army and naval forces attacked what is now Toronto.

turned out for the unveiling yesterday were retired teachers Ron Fletcher and Pat Gifford.

"The first thought is that it's funny," said Fletcher. "The second thought is, do you want a war memorial to be funny? I think I see the irony, but I'm not sure someone else, who actually fought in a war,

"I'm happy to see art, even art I don't like," said Gifford.

The two men agreed on one thing: They were going to have to discuss it over an afternoon drink. In the end they talked for an hour. "I like art that makes you think, that engages you," said Fletcher. "Some monuments are monuments."

A10 • TORONTO STAR • TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2008

GREATER TORONTO > THE CITY SEEN

LEST WE FORGET

Art that makes you think

Two giant toy soldiers, one standing, one fallen, are the focus of the city's latest public art. Monument to the War of 1812, unveiled yesterday, is the work of Vancouver artist/author Doug Coupland, who discusses war and remembrance in emails with reporter **Francine Kopun**

FROM: DOUG
TO: KOPUN, FRANCINE

Hi there.

My dad was in the Canadian Air Force (not the Armed Forces ... he's picky on that one) and so I grew up surrounded by military objects and imagery everywhere: crests, weapons, pictures of my father flying jets and on and on. Growing up, Nov. 11 was a huge deal and I get sombre on the subject quickly.

A few years ago I was on a train in England on Nov. 11 and suddenly the train stopped halfway inside a tunnel and everyone went silent for two minutes and it was a haunting experience for me, as if everyone died and their souls were collectively agreeing to go to heaven. It was like time stopped. And then the train started again and life resumed but it was different because of that small moment. I think Nov. 11 is a day when everyone, to some degree, harmonizes with everyone else in the best possible way.

Doug



Writer Doug Coupland's father, Doug Sr., was a member of the Canadian Air Force.

FROM: KOPUN, FRANCINE
TO: DOUG

What did your family do on Remembrance Day?

DC: In general there's an unofficial dinner at my parents' place, poppies mandatory, and Dad talks about his military experiences and old friends. Most of them are gone now and so there's a wistful side to things. Dad's 83 — he loved every



cial dinner at my parents' place, poppies mandatory, and Dad talks about his military experiences and old friends. Most of them are gone now and so there's a wistful side to things. Dad's 83 — he loved every moment of military life.

FK: Do you remember what you thought of it then?

DC: My earliest war memories are of Vietnam on the CBS news on this ancient B&W TV in the living room. I remember that it never seemed to be going well. Even in kindergarten you could sense that it was a useless stupid war.

FK: How long should society continue to honour Nov. 11?

DC: Always. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and to not remember old wars is to diminish vigilance.

FK: Do you think there's any chance some veterans might regard the sculpture as lacking in gravitas?

DC: I don't think so. I think it's



PHOTOS BY TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR

Monument to the War of 1812 was unveiled yesterday at the corner of Lake Shore Blvd. and Bathurst St.

pretty obvious what the piece says. Yes, it's partially about war in the abstract, but it's also a reminder to passersby who might not be fully aware of the importance of the War

of 1812 to our history. It's also bait to get people to go and see Fort York (where, BTW, you quickly learn how short people used to be in 1812).

Much cheer and fire away more Q's if you like,

Doug

FROM: DOUG
TO: KOPUN, FRANCINE

Yup, I'll be at the unveiling. The event itself will be on the short side (cold out) and afterwards I donate scale model maquettes to Fort York inside the building's lobby.

To more IMPORTANT subjects

FK: You say: "It's pretty obvious what the piece says." What do you think it says?

DC: I guess what I want to happen is for people to walk/drive/ride by and see these figures and say, "What the heck is going on here," and then maybe they'll stop and come over and see the figures in relationship to each other. And then they'll find out what they are and what they represent. The piece isn't so much an anti-war statement as it is a reminder of a) that there was once a War of 1812 when the Americans tried to take Canada and lost, b) Toronto exists because of this war, c) Canada exists because of this war, d) there are people out there trying to (literally) rewrite history to make it look like the U.S. didn't lose

and, e) why not take a stroll over to Historic Fort York, a trip rendered extra-surreal by the presence of the Gardiner.

FK: As the author of books of iconic Canadiana (*Souvenir of Canada*), what do you think is our most iconic statement on war?

DC: There's a photo of the trench-

es in WWI that I've never been able to shed from my mind. It's from the National Gallery, I think and has no copyright.

FK: What do you think of the red poppy pins?

DC: Please, dear God, can somebody invent a better pin so that they don't always fall off in the first three

minutes? And I remember they used to be three-coloured growing up. How hard is it to add a touch of green to it? It's as if by not taking pride in their craftsmanship we're forgetting something.

Doug



Doug Coupland at Fort York with members portraying the Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL WAR MEMORIAL

Monument to the War of 1812 comprises two giant toy soldiers, a standing member of the 1813 Royal Newfoundland Regiment and a fallen American soldier from the 16th Infantry Regiment, who would have fought each other on April 27, 1813, when U.S. army and naval forces attacked what is now Toronto.

Among the small crowd who

turned out for the unveiling yesterday were retired teachers Ron Fletcher and Pat Gidlow.

"The first thought is that it's funny," said Fletcher. "The second thought is, do you want a war memorial to be funny? I think I see the irony, but I'm not sure someone else, who actually fought in a war, would."

"I'm happy to see art, even art I don't like," said Gidlow.

The two men agreed on one thing: They were going to have to discuss it over an afternoon drink. In the end they talked for an hour.

"I like art that makes you think, that engages you," said Fletcher. "Some memorials or monuments don't challenge you to think."