

It's not unusual to be caught singing in the can: Just ask Sir Tom

A rare recording of singer Tom Jones singing in a lavatory is to go under the hammer at Christie's. The reel-to-reel tape, made two years before Jones's breakthrough hit *It's Not Unusual*, is his earliest-known recording. It has been put up for sale in a rock and pop memorabilia sale. The four unreleased tracks were recorded in the lavatories at the YMCA in Jones's home town of Pontypridd, South Wales, before he

EARLIEST RECORDING

hit the big time. The recordings are from 1962, when Jones, pictured, was fronting a rock 'n' roll band called The Senators and performed under the name Tommy Scott. They were recorded by a TV soundman on an eight-track portable studio. The recording is expected to fetch between

\$4,000 and \$6,000 in next week's auction. Liz Williams, president of the Pontypridd YMCA, added: "Tom began his singing career here and apparently he often used to sing in the toilets." *The Daily Telegraph*



QUESTIONS & ARTISTS

Dismantling the shards of past identities

Last week, Canadians from sea to shining sea celebrated the nation's birthday. Yet there are nations across the land that are much older, from the Ojibway to the Peigan and beyond. Now, *Face the Nation*, a new art exhibition at the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton, is showcasing contemporary First Nations artists inspired by these overlapping histories. Here, exhibit curator Catherine Crowston tells Leah Sandals more about these creative commonwealths.

Q When did you start developing this show and why?

A We started working on this show at least a year ago, and there are a number of different reasons why. One was we were doing an exhibition of work by Nicholas De Grandmaison, an early 20th-century artist who did paintings of First Nations tribes in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. What we wanted to do was showcase contemporary aboriginal artists working today who address issues raised by the Grandmaison portraits.

Q What kinds of issues?

A Well, De Grandmaison was a Russian aristocrat who came to Canada and found himself fascinated by First Nations culture. He actually was a friend of First Nations people such as the Peigan, and he created portraits that are quite respectful in many ways. But they're also part of a biased tradition of looking at First Nations people.

Q How do the aboriginal artists in the show approach that bias?

A Jeff Thomas is one of the artists in the show. For a long time his own work has been looking at the work of Edward

Curtis, [a non-First Nations photographer] who was documenting aboriginal people in the early 1900s. In this exhibition, he's worked on similar images from our collection.

Maria Hupfield has done a large mural based on Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, looking at how those images of the northern landscape erased the presence of aboriginal population. The Group of Seven talked about the north as "a pristine, virgin wilderness" and a lot of what they were picturing was in Georgian Bay, which has actually been the ancestral home of Hupfield's people for many, many centuries.

Q What about the more fashion-oriented work from KC Adams?

A Part of the show revolves around portraiture. And KC Adams' *Hybrid Portraits* document the current contemporary aboriginal cultural scene. All these people in her photographs are working artists or curators or writers. In a way they're like De Grandmaisons that have this heroicized posture, but they take on this gloss of the fashion photography. Also their T-shirts have embroidered slang words that have been used as insults of

aboriginal people, from "I'm on Indian time" to "Bingo player." What she's tried to do, I think, is use that language that's been used to denigrate aboriginal people and turn it back on itself.

Q This show opened with a panel on defining a contemporary aboriginal aesthetic. What came out of that?

A Well, you know, in the end we didn't address that specific question. But one of the most interesting things that came out of it is the idea that the investigation of identity is itself an aesthetic. I think that's common to the artists in the show, even the ones we haven't discussed: Kent Monkman, Terrance Houle, Lori Blondeau, Dana Claxton and Adrian Stimson.

Q Speaking of identity, you are non-aboriginal. How do you resolve this with organizing an exhibition that is so much about identity?

A I spent a great deal of time wondering whether I could do this. There are a lot of really good aboriginal curators in Canada, and there's a lot of important work being done by aboriginal curating collectives, both independently and in institutions. But I'd also worked with some of these artists in the past. And it also felt maybe too easy to say, "No, I can't do this."

Q What more must be done to bridge the gap between mainstream museums and First Nations art?

A The challenge we all face — and one of the things I think the panel brought up — is a divide between aboriginal artists that work in the mainstream art world and aboriginal artists who work in aboriginal communities. From what I heard, both of these are needed to move forward — it's important to open up the mainstream, but it's also important to maintain and honour tradition. And I would say that's the same for artists of all cultures.

■ *Face the Nation: New Portraits of the Past by Contemporary Aboriginal Artists* continues to Sept. 21 at the Art Gallery of Alberta. For more information, visit artgallery-alberta.com.

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PHOTO COURTESY ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

KC Adams' *I CLUB BABY SEALS*, Cyborg Hybrid Heather (art historian), 2008, is part of a project that portrays aboriginal artists in ways that borrow from both early portraiture and fashion photography.

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Above, left and right: Jeff Thomas juxtaposes his new images of Native people with ones from past photographers to create new perspectives on what it means to be a First Nations person. Top: Maria Hupfield's *Scout*, 2006, addresses the Canadian landscape and the representation of aboriginal life within it. Do you recognize the streetscape in the background?