

## Leonard Brooks: The best Canadian artist you've never heard of

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MISSISSAUGA — In life, Canadian artist Leonard Brooks was always something of an outsider in his homeland's arts community. Feeling Canada's post-war arts scene to be both stale and unappreciative of his works, Brooks spent many of his most productive years in the central Mexican city of San Miguel de Allende, where he helped found a vibrant artists' colony.

Between teaching English and the violin to local kids, Brooks turned out innovative and highly original abstract pieces that were a far cry from the scenes of snowy landscapes that were making the rounds in Canada at the time.

A selection of these works is currently on display at Port Credit's Rumi Gallery. Called

*Frank Leonard Brooks: A Canadian Abroad*

, the show groups pieces Brooks produced in Mexico and on his travels to places including Italy, Greece and the United States.

Although Brooks' most famous work,

*Potato Peelers*

, is a semi-literal depiction of sailors prepping spuds during World War II that hangs in the Canadian War Museum, Rumi Gallery director Joseph Rumi calls his abstract pieces "both wonderful and diverse."

"He is a tremendous talent who, for far too long has been under-appreciated," he adds.

In Brooks' works, the delight really is in the details. In addition to oils and watercolours, he uses a wide range of materials that give some of his pieces an objets trouvés feel. Among the multiple layers of a piece created in San Francisco is a card bearing Chinese writing that seems to have been picked up in that city's Chinatown. Other works contain fabric, sand, newspaper clippings and even some sheet music. But easily the most impressive example of artistic recycling is a piece called "Studio Souvenir, Rome" in which Brooks has taken what appear to be sweepings from the floor of a studio he rented in the Italian capital and turned them into an artwork. There are staples, a tack, string, bits of wood and even a few hairs in there.

Brooks, who died in 2011 a few days after his 100th birthday, was a very skilled landscape artist before moving into abstraction, a background which Rumi credits with providing his works with sensitivity and depth.

"A lot of great abstract artists from this period had that formal training before they jumped into abstractions so they had a greater understanding and knowledge of the landscape as a whole. So then, when they decided to abstract that landscape and look at it from that perspective they had a greater understanding of composition, colour, line, texture, all of those things that you look for in a great work of art."

*Frank Leonard Brooks: A Canadian Abroad*

runs until March 29 at Rumi Gallery (55 Woodlawn Ave.).



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