

WILLIAM FEATHERSTON, 81 / PAINTER AND TEACHER

Artist's work reflected his social conscience

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His work:

<http://williamfeatherston.com/work/portraits/>

Politically engaged - enraged might be more accurate - artist Bill Featherston didn't believe in subliminal messages.

One of his last shows, titled New World Order, includes an oil on wood painting of former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wearing a formal gown and playing a grand piano on a makeshift stage while Lebanon burns in the background.

Another, which depicts world leaders standing behind a barrier bolstered by sandbags labelled greed, love and various other human conditions, is entitled: Who are the Patriots.

William Lorne Featherston, who was born in Toronto in 1927, forged a birth certificate when he was 16 so that he could enlist in the Royal Canadian Navy midway through the Second World War. He served in the Atlantic and the Pacific and, after his discharge in 1946, worked at a series of numbing jobs.

Eventually, he got a grant from Veteran's Affairs to complete high school and earn a teaching certificate, which led to a job in a reform school. While teaching for the next five years, he completed a B.A. at night and in the summers and went briefly to the Ontario College of Art before leaving Canada in 1958 and settling in St. Ives, Cornwall.

Living in that thriving art community, and associating with the likes of Francis Bacon and Barbara Hepworth, was the beginning of his real vocation.

He returned to Canada in the early 1970s, taught for a decade at the Vancouver School of Art, where his students included Attila Richard Lukacs, Angela Grossmann and Laurie Papou, exhibited at local galleries and was given a retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

As an artist, he moved from abstraction to representational modes and played with colour and texture.

But it was his social conscience, as a peace activist and left-leaning political advocate, that drove him to make paintings that derided capitalism and imperialism and exposed the horrors of torture and social and political injustices. To view his work go to <http://www.williamfeatherston.com>

William Featherston

William Featherston was born on July 25, 1927, in Toronto and died in Vancouver of bladder cancer on May 11, 2009. He was 81. He leaves his third wife, Gail Bigsby, their two sons, William and Stephen, and daughter Susan, from his first marriage, and Sasha, from his second.