



The artists at the installation of their gallery sign, FLASHTOWN. (Left to right) Kate Wilson, Otis Tamasauskas, Barb Shaw, Tim Howe, Harold Klunder, Catharine Carmichael, Clarke Rogers and Rae Johnson.

# Flight to Flesherton

**T**HE whitewashed wooden storefronts of the block of buildings where Hickling's General Store used to stand is an unlikely place for a commercial art gallery. The store is damp and musty and the walls could use another coat of paint. Kitschy oil paintings of northern pines and placid lakes hang in clusters at the entrance like fading postcards and a hand-painted sign proclaims "Welcome to Flashtown" in neat block letters.

Flashtown, a gallery run by a group of expatriates from Toronto, opened its doors last month with the ceremonial hanging of a sign designed by nine local artists (each contributed a different letter because they couldn't afford a proper neon sign). A substantial crowd — by Flesherton standards, anyway — gathered to watch the proceedings. Flashtown may not yet be rivalling the local Legion as a community hangout, but it is causing quite an agreeable stir in this village of 600.

Over the last seven years, 14 Toronto artists fleeing soaring studio rents have taken up residence in Flesherton, located about 100 kilometres northwest of Toronto, south of Georgian Bay. "The artists," as they are known by the local inhabitants, are supplanted former resident and neo-Nazi Ronald Gostick — he moved to Alberta recently — as the local curiosity.

It's an overcast Thursday afternoon and gallery director Clarke Rogers is talking up a storm to a local resident about the gallery's serious art, landscapes and painted constructions by contemporary artists and Flesherton residents Harold Klunder, Rae Johnson and Catharine Carmichael. The visitor, a local businessman, smiles appreciatively at the canvases and a blurry video installation, priced from \$50 to \$5,000, and heads out the door.

"And don't forget to bring the wife next time," yells Rogers, shutting the door behind him.

A former artistic director at Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, Rogers, 42, moved to Flesherton almost two years ago to escape the high cost of housing in Toronto



FLASHTOWN: A group of artists

fleeing Toronto's soaring rents have found plenty of space and creative energy, not to mention wild ducks, in the small town of Flesherton

to and to get away from city life. He and his wife, painter Rae Johnson, bought an old, 12-acre trout farm on Highway 4 a few years ago and have found that the mortgage payments are less than half of what they paid in rent in Toronto. When they first saw the property — two dusty shacks backed by a large pond full of fish and wild ducks — Johnson and Rogers were spellbound. "It looked exactly like the landscapes in Rae's paintings," says Rogers.

Johnson, 37, works out of a large studio on the property and enjoys the "creative space" afforded her by the rural setting. A few years ago, she grew disenchanted with the Queen Street West art scene and working in "an absolute slum of a studio" that she was renting for \$1,250 a month in Toronto. Now she visits

BY ISABEL VINCENT  
The Globe and Mail

meet with her art dealer, Carmen Lamanna, and calls Flesherton home.

"It's Tom Thomson country after all," she says with a smile. For Thomson, the Owen Sound region where he grew up and where the Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery now stands) was a favored place. The Canadian painter, David Milne, also worked in the area.

Perhaps this is one reason Flesherton has become an impromptu arts colony. Barb Shaw, a local astrologer and one of the first Toronto artists to

ago, calls Flesherton "a power centre."

"It's like a magnet that draws a certain type of people. It's something that can't be explained in the sense of the real world as we know it. The artists' colony just happened. My husband and I were planning to travel further north, but something kept drawing us to Flesherton," she says.

Klunder chuckles at this description but admits that he and his wife, Catharine Carmichael, also moved to Flesherton "for psychic reasons" — as well as its proximity to the local bus route (they don't own a car). Klunder, who used to rent studio space on Niagara Street in Toronto before the building was turned into the headquarters for a chic clothing manufacturer, arrived in Flesherton to visit a friend and

House Hotel on street. Carmichael rent out studio; artists and live in a of old newspaper furniture and ass on the first floor hotel.

"We didn't see of the money," whose work is so by the Sable-C Toronto. "I this get away from the hyper careerists. There are Toronto who are of being in the people here seem their own pace. Toronto, but not

ety." Carmichael at they don't really closer to the city miss certain of French bread at Toronto edition Mail," says Carr

Klunder says artists' colonies are made up of people, the Flesherton probably the firing of visual art "We've become Bohemian sense. interesting to see influences other could redefine hies look at the a

Rogers also has a great deal regional arts ce releasing the space in downtown commercial gallery place "so artists meet in each when they want and wants to e theatre and v with workshops artists. In June, a successful tw at the local h students partic workshops led b print-making d Otis Tamasaus nearby Penville "I'm a part e now and I want

kind of modern soap opera about teenagers in a suburban development, which is referred to inside

...it's Stanley, a famed American sitcom), by changing its time slot from Sunday to Wednesday nights; the network managed to re-

...neps pay for this network — the trend worries me. Do we have to have people hopping from bed to bed like Street Legal to make, it

about. What exactly will we learn by doing a movie on Clifford Ols or the Montreal Massacre?" Gerussi, the star of the show

# Flesherton draws artists

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accessible," says Rogers. "Artists are so often perceived as an elite, but we have such a unique gathering of artists here who simply want to be a part of the community."

Rogers wants to run for local council to help solve some regional problems, such as the lack of sewers.

Also, a recent proposal to cut down a few centuries-old trees to widen a patch of highway has Rogers worried that the village may soon be overrun with housing developments. "It's booming," he says, noting that the village has three real estate offices.

"They (the artists) love the place and want to be a part of it, but they're very comfortable with the village the way it is," said Geraldine Robinson, secretary of the Flesherton and District Chamber of Commerce.

Robinson says she likes the artists because they're not "pushy" and have tried to participate in community life.

"We're proud to have them here because they make us see ourselves in a different light," she said, adding that artists such as Klunder and Carmichael have been active on the library board and other community development projects.

When Carmichael's daughter, Elizabeth, was born last April, Robinson and some of the other village women knitted clothes and baked cookies.

But community spirit is one thing and selling art is another, say the colony's critics. While Rogers' Flashtown was hailed by the local Chamber of Commerce as "a timely business venture in the village," Toronto art dealers are skeptical.

"It's a nice idea, but to look at it for any major source of income is simply too romantic," says Avrom Isaacs, a dealer for Flesherton artist Lorne Wagman and owner of the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto.

Rogers seems unconcerned and says he isn't looking for big pay-offs, although he admits he would like to see the Toronto arts community taking more interest in the village.

"You have to do it yourself," he says of the gallery and proposed summer school. "Creative energy is much more important than security and that really has to be the message of art."



The Maysles brothers, from left; David and Albert, capture Paul Brennan's pitch in Salesman.

**TELEVISION REVIEW** / Feature-length documentary is 21 years old but it's as engrossing and affecting as ever

## No death of a Salesman here

BY JOHN HASLETT CUFF  
Television Critic

TELEVISION audiences are accustomed to the big-budget, high-tech, emotional inspirations of prime-time newsmagazines that the 21-year-old film, *Salesman* (tonight on PBS, Channel 17 at 11:30 p.m.), may stun them. The unadorned, pathos and intimacy of this feature-length documentary is as engrossing and affecting as ever. Because there is no obvious intervention by the filmmakers, Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin, the small, painful truths about our common fragility seem to hit harder.

With no interviewer in sight, no hyped-up narrator in earshot and, best of all, no falsely exciting music or dazzling computer wipes, spins or other gimmickry, there is nothing to interfere with the naturally fascinating drama of "ordinary" life recorded in *Salesman*.

The Maysles call their work (which includes *Gimme Shelter* and *Grey Gardens*) "direct cinema," films that first utilized the newer, smaller, more portable and relatively unobtrusive cameras that so dramatically changed movies and television news gathering. The Maysles like their famed fellow documentarian Frederick Wiseman, sought the way to capture genuine fragments of contemporary life as

directly as possible, simply following their subjects around and filming them for weeks at a time, then taking the film back to the Steenbeck (an editing machine) and cutting it to a particular shape.

The wonderful thing is that the drama and the insights contained are simply there in the raw footage, captured more by patience and hard work than the sort of artifice and emotional coercion that too often shape "news" shows such as 48 Hours.

*Salesman* is justly considered a classic, although this is apparently the first time it has been shown on television. Shot over six weeks, it chronicles the activities of four Bible salesmen who are making their door-to-door pitches, first in Boston and then in Florida. The Maysles (and Zwerin, who co-directed/edited) could have focused on one of the more successful salesmen, but instead chose Paul Brennan, a 20-year veteran who is on the slippery slope. It was a wise and (now) perfectly obvious choice. Brennan is voluble and vulnerable and his failure is more representative of the darker truth of the American Dream.

The unsuccessful salesman tells the same lies ("This has the recommendation of the Pope . . . You must have the Bible blessed, or it won't benefit you as much") as they hot shot, it's the tone of voice and the look on his face that make all the

difference. The stink of fear, the failure of nerve is clear, perhaps especially so to the salesman's customers, most of whom seem trapped in the impoverished gloom of their own failed dreams.

The film passes no judgments and makes no obvious attempt to point our attention or sympathies. As much as we might easily scoff at the tawdriness of selling plastic-covered, illustrated Bibles door-to-door to unresponsive people, it's impossible not to like a couple of these characters, as well as pity them. They are, after all, simply working, working hard at a rather joyless task.

But *Salesman's* strength is Brennan. To watch his unravelling, to listen to his increasingly pathetic excuses and view the obvious discomfort of his more successful colleagues is squeamishly fascinating, because we have all felt and beheld that way at some horrible point in our lives. His sense of self-worth is so clearly tied to his performance at work that the failure is quite devastating. For a documentary to be so revealing and so live of the darker truth of the American Dream.

It remains a brilliant example of that much abused term, cinema verité. Its power is undiminished by the passage of time, for the art of the "big sell" is as central to the American Dream as it ever was.