

Speaking Notes
The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella
Speaker of the Senate of Canada

Tribute to Tom Forrestall
November 8, 2008

Your Honour,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you Allison McCain for your kind introduction. To each and everyone present here this evening thank you for your support of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and especially for your presence this evening to celebrate and pay tribute to Tom Forrestall, a most unique and remarkable Canadian artist.

Your Honour, the presence of the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick speaks to the high regard in which Tom Forrestall is held by the peoples of the Province and of Canada. Your Honour knows that it takes many hands to build a nation and the hands which hold and bring the brush to canvas are very special hands.

A son of the Annapolis Valley, Tom as been assiduous in helping to grow art heritage in our province and across Canada. And so it is that the Order of Canada is enriched by being able to number among its members this Canadian artist “par excellence”.

Tom’s approach and his artefacts reflect a unique philosophy of art where his featured “magic realist” style captures the essence of beauty and truth in all that he paints. His work has been an expression of right thinking and right feeling, sprinkled from time to time with his ancestral Hibernic, heuristic yet risible mischief. I found this mischievous element to be declared during last year’s commission of watercolours which Tom completed in Rome, where he placed a red bouquet of flowers in each of the scenes from the Holy City. No doubt Raffaello entombed in the Pantheon and Buonarroti were chuckling. It is to be pointed out that this series was completed by Tom as a generous contribution to the fundraising in favour of St. Patrick’s Church in Halifax.

Long before A.G. Baugarten developed aesthetics as a part of philosophy, thinkers of antiquity through the Middle Ages considered beauty as an important element of the cosmos associated with order, harmony, and mathematics. Classical philosophy treated and conceived beauty alongside truth, goodness, love, being, and the divine. In this conceptualization, beauty holds supreme and spiritual value.

The “vision” of Tom Forrestall reflects such values. His “vision” includes going beyond his powers as a painter and expressing directly and symbolically his spirituality in the imagery of his works. I have recently had the wonderful opportunity to observe his methodology and how the “vision” is so critical for Tom.

The Senate of Canada has commissioned Tom to do a portrait which will eventually hang in the Centre Block on Parliament Hill. Concerning this commission Tom wrote these words:

“If the Almighty will grant me the vision, and I have faith
He will, a mighty reach will be made for that perfection
beyond my powers...”

And so it has been that through this process that began with his visit to Parliament where he explored, saw and felt the place and its history in the life of Canada, a vision was developed, much akin to the “Formal Cause” of Aristotle from whence proceeds through the efficiency of this premier artist whose hands passed ever finer brushes to capture on canvas both the highly detailed elements together with the story of the whole “gestalt”.

Let me conclude by suggesting that Tom’s brother and my dear late friend, the Honourable Senator Michael Forrestall is looking down on us approvingly this evening. As Tom spent many months painting the portrait for the Senate, his thoughts often went to his late brother, who was in the Senate for fifteen years. Michael would well remind us in the words of Romain Rolland who wrote in “Some Musicians of Former Days”, that:

“The political life of a nation is only a superficial part of its being; in order to learn its inner life – the source of its actions – we must penetrate to its very soul by way of its literature, its philosophy, and its art, where the ideas, the passions and the dreams of its people are reflected.”

And so it is right and good that we have gathered this evening to honour, celebrate and pay tribute to Tom Forrestall, an acclaimed Canadian artist who has contributed so much to the artistic life of Canada and to the soul of our country.

Notwithstanding that the office in which I currently serve is called Speaker, I realize that it is less a licence for me to be speaking but rather it should be my role to facilitate others to speak, therefore on your behalf I wish to call upon our honouree to speak. Ladies and Gentlemen, Tom Forrestall.