

# Halifax art exhibit explores Canada's passion for hockey

Darryl Sittler working with Saskatchewan artist on 10-Point Game

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[CBC News](#)

When it comes to hockey, there's the art of the game and there's art about the game — and Canadians are passionate about both.

Hockey is at the heart of a new exhibit at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the largest it has ever held.



*Some of the heads are missing from Graeme Patterson's work-in-progress that will commemorate former Toronto Maple Leaf Darryl Sittler's 10-point game in 1976. (CBC)*

Titled *Arena: The art of hockey*, it is being mounted while Halifax is co-hosting the 2008 IIHF World Hockey Championships.

Darryl Sittler is one of the stars of the show — he's working with Saskatchewan artist Graeme Patterson on a stop-motion film that celebrates the former Toronto Maple Leafs captain's record-setting 10-point game of Feb. 7, 1976.

Patterson's film, *10-Point Game*, takes place on a huge table-hockey set being built to resemble the old Maple Leaf Gardens.

Sittler was in Halifax Wednesday to survey the three floors of art dedicated to hockey.

"It's a passion for people and obviously artists are no different from other Canadians. They love the game and they have their favourite players and their favourite teams," he said.

"You walk around here and you see the guys like Bobby Orr, Paul Henderson and [Wayne] Gretzky, the different players that were childhood idols to the artists, and they've done an interesting, creative job of presenting it so that all people can enjoy it."



*Sittler, shown in 2003, was in Halifax Wednesday to look at hockey art. (Aaron Harris/Canadian Press)*

Patterson, who met Sittler through an art patron who commissioned his work, plans to get No. 27 to narrate the game for his five-minute film.

Patterson is artist-in-residence at the AGNS during the show. After the show, his film may be destined for the Jumbotron.

"The game is just something I'm so passionate about and to be able to combine it with art is great," Patterson said Wednesday.

AGNS curator Ray Cronin told CBC Radio said he discovered that Canadian artists are most likely to have produced work about our national game.

"At one point I was at a conference with 40 curators from across northern Europe and the only names they could give me of hockey artists from their countries were Annika Larsson ... and Kristian Simolin, who I'd already found," he said.

In the exhibit, Canadian artists such as painters Wanda Koop and Landon Mackenzie and sculptors Aganetha Dyck, James Carl and Greg Forrest, explore the hero worship, the pop culture and the national fever around hockey in the exhibit.

"What people are looking at is a sense of nostalgia, looking back at their childhood . They're looking at style — the way hockey looks, the banners, the uniforms, all the stuff around the game," Cronin said.

Many are fascinated with the 1972 Canada-Russia hockey series.

"Artists are very interested in the way we use hockey to create a sense of nationalism," he said.

The show is drawing curious hockey fans, including groups of men, somewhat of an anomaly in art galleries. One of their favourite exhibits is the life-sized ice-surfacing machine made of polystyrene foam.

"Seeing the Zamboni makes their jaws drop," Cronin said.

Then there's Gretzky, on a cross, surrounded by lions, tigers and other figures that represent the names of hockey teams.

"There's a tradition in Quebec art, a Catholic tradition of depictions of these Canadian martyrs ... like Jean de Brébeuf. So [photographer] Diana Thorneycroft took images from popular culture and created these kinds of ideas about Canadian martyrdom," Cronin said.

Another work that's getting a laugh is a screen capture of a Halloween skeleton in a Leafs jersey sitting on a lawn chair with a hand-made sign that says "Leafs fan waiting for the cup."

There's something about hockey that inspires Canadians, Cronin said.

"When I found out that Halifax was going to be co-hosting the world championships, I just knew I'd have to do something like this," he said.

"For me, it's a kind of chance to combine two passions — I work with art every day, I trained as an artist, I've done it my whole professional life — and at the same time, hockey has always been my main escape from art."

*With files from Canadian Press, Q*