

Artist creates tribute to dying Prairie town

Graeme Patterson recreates Woodrow, Sask., in a Halifax gallery

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[CBC Arts](#)

The once-thriving farm community of Woodrow in southern Saskatchewan has almost become a ghost town — and its fate has been captured in haunting small scale by a resident artist.

Graeme Patterson, a video and installation artist who has sold two works to the National Gallery of Canada, shows his installation *Woodrow* at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax beginning Saturday.

Patterson, a graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, is now the sole occupant of the Patterson family homestead in Woodrow.

His version of the town features small-scale buildings, combined with moving machinery, animated videos and audio art. All contained in one room of the art gallery, it includes a hockey arena, church, homestead and junk pit.

The homestead is a particularly dark vision, with its broken windows and small figures of rats and mice combined with animated video.

The real Woodrow, southeast of Swift Current, was once a vibrant farming community but has become a shadow of itself as the economy deteriorated, Patterson said in an interview with CBC radio.

Many Canadians will identify with the story he tells of a town that's faded away, he said.

"Within Canada, a lot of people do come from small towns and even small communities and I think there are a lot of similarities among people who come from these places — though they all eventually leave," he said.

"That's maybe the connection that people get when they come in. They don't have to know the story of my family to get the work, because they can make their own connections and own little stories just through the buildings and characters."

One central part of Patterson's installation is a grain elevator about 3½ metres tall, which has one side ripped open to expose a machine that makes a sound like a heartbeat.

"The elevator ... it's the thing that symbolizes this as a Prairie town, but it's also the heart of the town economically and it's the thing that basically made things happen," Patterson said.

Other painstaking details include the junk pit, which holds an old TV, a picture frame, a golf cart and Patterson's grandfather's old truck.

"It was natural for me to have a junk pit, because that's the piece that represents time," he said. "It's basically the 100 years of civilization that has occurred within Woodrow and this is the remnants of it."

Patterson has sold two of his video works, *Monkey and Deer* and *The Grain Elevator*, to the National Gallery.

The *Woodrow* show, curated by Ray Cronin of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, will be in Halifax until April 9.

It is a co-production with the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon and will also be included in the Montreal Biennial in the spring.