



INSPIRED: Roly Fenwick's *Cryptic Field* 1991, an oil-on-canvas work, is part of his new exhibit at Museum London.

Artist captures 'emptiness'

BY NOEL GALLAGHER
Free Press Arts
& Entertainment Reporter

Roly Fenwick's landscape paintings will never be confused with picturesque nature scenes.

"My interest is not in pretty scenery, but in probing to reveal the forces beneath the land's veneer," says the Londoner, whose often dark and bleak works make up *A New and Greener Light*, on exhibit at Museum London.

"I want people to have a perspective of what the heart can see and the eyes can't," adds Fenwick of the collection, featuring 44 of his oil paintings, with 16 drawings and watercolours.

Most of them are set in the marshes, wetlands and swamps of Big Bay on the Bruce Peninsula, an area that has long inspired the artist, who was born and raised in Owen Sound.

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ness and being there brings me down to earth. My paintings are about the process of growing and change. I isolate the trees because they are like monuments, old matriarchs standing there holding all the memories of the land dating back to prehistory."

He refers to the rugged Ontario region as "God's country" and his "ancestral blood-roots" since it's been home to six generations of Fenwick's family.

The artist still maintains a cottage at Big Bay and spends the summer there doing "the field work" for the paintings he creates in his London studio during the rest of the year.

Ted Fraser, the exhibit's guest curator, says Fenwick depicts a utopian garden in turmoil: "This is nature immanent with spirit and desire, a healing, sensual antidote for the malaise of excessive rationality, perfection, progress and consumption — a new and greener light."

The artist himself hopes to trigger "introspective and poetic" responses from viewers of his art.

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Roly Fenwick

"Of course, I want to enrich their spirits and get them to realize there's more to look at than cities, pavement and automobiles," he adds. "But I would also like them to see the fragility of mankind, that we're really only one small part of this whole, immense planet. And, as the conscious part of nature, we should be treating it better."

Fenwick is a professor emeritus at University of Western Ontario's visual arts department, where he taught from 1968 to 1989.

"Teaching had nothing but positive influences on my work. It gave me a chance to discuss art and get feedback from my students and I'm sure I learned more from them than they ever did from me."

In the foreword to *A New and Greener Light's* catalogue, Brian Meehan, executive director of Museum London, writes: "Roly has negotiated a fine balance between his intellectual understanding of our art history, a physical understanding of the ground on which he paints and a spiritual understanding of what the landscape around him embodies. His work openly acknowledges what has come before but, through its visual honesty and reticence, is something that is distinctly its own."

Fenwick, who marked his 70th birthday last week, says he's begun "the Indian summer of my life" and intends to continue painting landscapes.

"I still have a lot to say about them."