

Seymour gallery adds personal touch

Memorabilia provides insights into work of L. LeMoine FitzGerald

■ **Ordinary Beauty: Prints by L. LeMoine FitzGerald, from the Burnaby Art Gallery collection, on until June 7 at the Seymour Art Gallery. Free lecture by Ian Thom, senior curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery, June 1, 2 p.m. Free 20-minute curator's talks Thursdays at noon. seymourartgallery.com.**

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It was serendipitous.

Talking to one of the Seymour Art Gallery's longest-serving volunteers, Ina Law, interim curator Hilary Letwin excitedly told her about her next project, a retrospective of Group of Seven artist Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890-1956).

Law said, "Oh FitzGerald? FitzGerald from Winnipeg? You know, my daughter is married to a man whose mother knew

him because he used to come and sketch on their farm in Snowflake, Man," recalls Letwin.

Law went on to say, "In fact, I think she's got some shoeboxes of letters and all sorts of other things that they've saved as a result of this connection."

Law put Letwin in touch with her daughter Karen's mother-in-law, Ferne Green, 81, a current Portage la Prairie resident, who was happy to offer stories and mementos related to her family's relationship with the celebrated artist, some of which is currently featured in the resulting exhibition, *Ordinary Beauty*, on now until June 7 at the Deep Cove gallery.

The show features a selection of FitzGerald's prints from throughout his life, on loan from the Burnaby Art Gallery, known for its extensive collection of works on paper, says Letwin, who serves as the show's



Seymour Art Gallery's Hilary Letwin looks over the FitzGerald show. PHOTO MIKE WAKEFIELD

curator.

"It's wonderful to have this opportunity to show all of these works together that measure the breadth of his career," says Letwin. "But also to infuse the works with

a personal element through the contributions of Ferne because it's all well and good to put art up on a wall, but to be able to show the art with a combination of letters and photographs and

other personal memorabilia and memories of this person I think really brings the artist to life in a way that is not always possible by just looking at their art."

The Group of Seven

artist, a member for a year before it disbanded in 1933, spent a few summers on the West Coast in the early 1940s as his daughter, Patricia, lived on Bowen Island. However, FitzGerald spent much of his life working at the Winnipeg School of Art. From 1924 to 1947 he served as first teacher, then principal. A number of the prints on display at the Seymour Gallery served as Christmas cards that FitzGerald would send out to friends, family and professional contacts during those years, typically landscapes, or architectural views, many of which were from windows of different buildings around the school.

"You can almost see him positioning himself in front of a window and capturing a different view," says Letwin. "The interesting thing about these architectural views is that he's very drawn, it would seem, to Italian architectural features. If you look quickly at these prints it's almost as if it's a view in Florence or in another

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over we were all back in the house," says Green.

Green recalls an early embarrassment, jumping to FitzGerald's defense at age eight.

"Mr. FitzGerald was pretty well bald but he had artist hair I guess, sort of longer, curly up the back around. The people that were there, they were actually buying a picture. They sort of teased him a little bit about his hair being bald on top or something. I said, 'well, when winter comes it will all grow out' because being a farm girl of course I thought the horses. . . all grew thick hair in the wintertime and I thought he would too. And they laughed



Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890 - 1956) was the only member of the Group of Seven to be based in western Canada.

at that. I remember being really embarrassed. I can

still remember how awful I felt because I knew I'd said something silly," she says.

It was a reciprocal relationship as Green and her family would stay with the FitzGeralds in Winnipeg as needed, for visits to the doctor or dentist, for business or simply a vacation.

Green recalls sleeping in a room where FitzGerald's paintings were hung and laughs at her younger self, turning her nose up at his nudes, of someone's back, much preferring his nature pictures.

The two families stayed in contact through the years, Green inviting the couple over for dinner after she was married and Green's mother caring for Mrs. FitzGerald

when she got older.

"They were very special people and we really had a good friendship," says Green.

Green and her son and daughter-in-law are travelling to the North Shore this weekend to see the exhibition. While Green has seen a number of FitzGerald's shows over the years, it's always something she looks forward to.

She recognizes the landscapes in his paintings, depictions of the old Snowflake family farm, or of her father. One painting "Potato Patch," shows him hard at work hoeing potatoes.

"Every time I go I see something that I didn't see before," she says.