

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 19, 2012



WILLIAM KURELEK | THE MESSENGER
at the Art Gallery of Hamilton

On view from January 28 to April 29, 2012, at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, **WILLIAM KURELEK: THE MESSENGER** is the first major exhibition of William Kurelek's (1927 – 1977) work in a quarter century. An ambitious collaboration between the Art Gallery of Hamilton (AGH), Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV) and Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG), and comprising over eighty important paintings from Canada and abroad, *William Kurelek: The Messenger* is the largest exhibition of the artist's work ever mounted.

William Kurelek—who was born in Alberta, raised in Manitoba and settled in Toronto—was an intriguing combination of everyman and visionary, and his work is equally complex. Widely recognized as a painter of reminiscences of his Prairie childhood and a chronicler of the experiences of various cultural groups in Canada, Kurelek conjured a sense of a timeless and innocent past. But there is another, equally important, Kurelek: the anguished prophet of a modern apocalypse, his art an indictment of the secular age and a testament to his unwavering Roman Catholic faith. Kurelek was at his best and most challenging when he successfully bridged the pastoral and the prophetic, combined memory and message. This exhibition explores the various ways in which he strove to reconcile the two poles of his thinking and practice—in essence, his being.

This exhibition is co-curated by Tobi Bruce (AGH), Andrew Kear (WAG) and Mary Jo Hughes (AGGV). This project is generously funded by the Canadian Government through the Department of Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Program. *William Kurelek: The Messenger* is part of **A League of Their Own** – a year-long celebration of visionary Canadian artists at the Gallery, presented by **TD**.

A substantial, fully-illustrated bilingual catalogue of over 250 pages accompanies the exhibition and is available for purchase in the Shop at AGH for \$40. In addition to major contributions by curators Bruce, Hughes and Kear, the catalogue also features essays by Avrom Isaacs, Kurelek's dealer and friend; Brian Dedora, who worked with Kurelek; and the late Brian Smylski, former executive director of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery.

An interactive website for the exhibition is available at www.kurelek.ca, and includes an illustrated biographical timeline, video, and activities for schoolchildren.

A rich selection of programmes accompany the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, including a six-part **AGH talk series** entitled **The Complex William Kurelek**. The talk schedule is as follows:

Thursday, February 2 at 6:30 pm – Discover the Messenger

AGH Senior Curator and *The Messenger* co-curator **Tobi Bruce** provides an in-depth look at the exhibition, how it came together and why it's such an important and timely project.

Thursday, February 16 at 6:30 pm – In Conversation: Tony Urquhart and Dennis Reid

Artist **Tony Urquhart** and Canadian art historian and curator **Dennis Reid** discuss the Toronto art world in the 1960s and 1970s, the role of The Isaacs Gallery (Toronto) in Kurelek's career and how Kurelek did (or did not) participate in 'the scene'.

Thursday, March 8 at 6:30 pm – In the Workshop: Craftsman, Framer and Artist

Brian Dedora worked alongside Kurelek as a picture framer for six years at The Isaacs Gallery. Sharing stories of their friendship, Dedora provides insights into the artist's meticulous attention to detail, his sense of humour and his relentless drive to create.

Thursday, March 22 at 6:30 pm – Film screening of William Kurelek's *The Maze*

In 1969, award-winning American filmmaker **Robert Young** made a fascinating biographical film about William Kurelek. Over 40 years later, Young's sons Nick and Zack have uncovered and completed their father's work. The resulting film will premiere in Ontario with this screening, with **Nick Young** in attendance for a post-screening Q&A.

Thursday, April 5 at 6:30 pm - William Kurelek's *Passion of Christ: A Cinematic Vision*

Join **Debra Attenborough**, Director of the Niagara Falls Art Gallery (home to Kurelek's *The Passion of Christ* series) as she discusses this pivotal work. Influenced by the increasing popularity of television, Kurelek viewed this series as a storyboard, a preparation for the development of a TV or movie production based on his images.

Thursday, April 19 - A Critic's Perspective: Kurelek, A Singular Artist Among Many

Robert Enright, artist, art critic and professor, takes a look at Kurelek through the lens of artistic production, both historical and contemporary. Kurelek's work was very different from that of his peers, and Enright examines the grim, the frightening and the funny through a varied and interesting selection of artists.

AGH *talk* series package for all six talks is \$30 for AGH Members; \$50 for Students and Seniors; and \$60 for Non-Members. Individual talks are \$6 for AGH Members; \$10 for Students and Seniors; and \$12 for Non-Members. Please visit www.artgalleryofhamilton.com for purchase and registration information.

The Art Gallery of Hamilton's programming activities are assisted by the City of Hamilton, Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The Art Gallery of Hamilton is located at 123 King Street West in downtown Hamilton, 905-527-6610. Gallery hours are: Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, 11 am to 6 pm; Thursday, 11 am to 8 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 12 noon to 5 pm; closed on Monday. The Gallery will be open from 12 noon to 5 pm on the following holidays: Family Day (Monday, February 20), the first day of the March Break (Monday, March 12), Good Friday (Friday, April 6) and Easter Monday (Monday, April 9).

Please visit www.artgalleryofhamilton.com for complete exhibition and programming information.

-END-

To access high-resolution images of AGH exhibitions and programming, please e-mail: steve@artgalleryofhamilton.com

For further information on the Art Gallery of Hamilton, its exhibitions and programming, please contact: Steve Denyes, Manager, Communications
[T] 905-527-6610, ext. 255 [E] steve@artgalleryofhamilton.com [W] www.artgalleryofhamilton.com