



ROD MACIVOR, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Ship among Eric Walker's unusual works on display at Elle McLaughlin Gallery.

# Art taps into history

## Artist gaining national attention

BY PAUL GESSELL

Canadians have always had romantic, star-struck notions, first about ships, then about trains.

Ships and trains are what built this country; ships and trains are what brought many of us and our ancestors to Canada; ship and trains will forever be treated like national heroes.

The iconic status accorded those modes of communication is evident in the almost worshipful 3-D "paintings" — actually they're assemblages of found objects stuck to plywood — comprising a new, untitled show by Ottawa artist Eric Walker at Elle McLaughlin Gallery.

At first glance, Walker's rough-hewn works look like joyous folk art. But such a description sells Walker short. The works are, indeed, joyous, but simultaneously tap into our deepest emotions about national symbols, cross-country travel and dangerous voyages. These are works that make you want to stand up and sign *O Canada*.

"To call Eric Walker a folk artist, as we call such artists as Maud Lewis or Collins Eisen-

hauer, would not be an error," the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia wrote in a brochure publicizing Walker's 1998 show there entitled *Disaster Ship Series*.

"There is a material and conceptual naïveté which permeates Walker's work. There is not, however, an intellectual naïveté. The difference between the artists is that from the beginning Walker has been conscious of serious esthetic intentions and of the need to choose his way of working."

Walker's work is increasingly gaining national attention. A show at the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., has just ended and is expected to embark soon on a national tour. His 1998 show at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia toured that province.

Some of Walker's work was on display last fall at Ottawa-Carleton regional headquarters. The regional government acquired three of his works last year, bringing to eight the number of Walker's works in the region's collection.

Ten works are on display at Elle McLaughlin. They include ships, trains and the giant work entitled *The Ottawa Airport as Seen from a Satellite in Space, 2000*.

Walker's show opens today and continues until May 9. Elle McLaughlin Gallery is at 503 Rideau St. and is open Tuesday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information, telephone 562-4151.