

# Artist plays on superstar status with his latest work

**GARRY NEILL KENNEDY:** SUPERSTAR SHADOW, an installation by Garry Neill Kennedy, on view at Stride Gallery, 722 11th Avenue S.W., until July 27.



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In *Garry Neill Kennedy: Superstar Shadow*, Garry Neill Kennedy plays on the art world name game by spelling out his own in three-metre tall letters around the walls of Stride.

The Letraset typeface is one called Superstar Shadow.

Painted on the walls, the graphically elegant name quietly engulfs the space like a wrap-around billboard. The work's apparent egotism is witty and outrageous. But the gesture points in several directions, all consistent with the critical thrust of Kennedy's conceptual art.

"This installation is my designer-label show," says the 50-year-old artist, who also is president of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax.

By making his name the content of a huge painting, Kennedy comments both on the contemporary art world and on a materialistic society that defines its values in relation to the consumption of goods.

"I think of how names are used in commercial enterprises," says the artist. "Have you ever seen the logo of a company called TRW that says underneath 'A Company Called TRW'? Then I saw a cartoon of a company with a sign across the top that says '\$1 Billion'. That says everything. So what else is there to paint?"

Name designers and sports stars sell their celebrity names to endorse products. Here, by implying that the artist's name (the signature or label) has become

more important than the work of art, Kennedy implies that art itself has become an upscale designer product whose value is a function of the market place.

"Then there are the silly things you think about," says Kennedy. "I found my profile slipping and I wanted to boost my image, raise my profile."

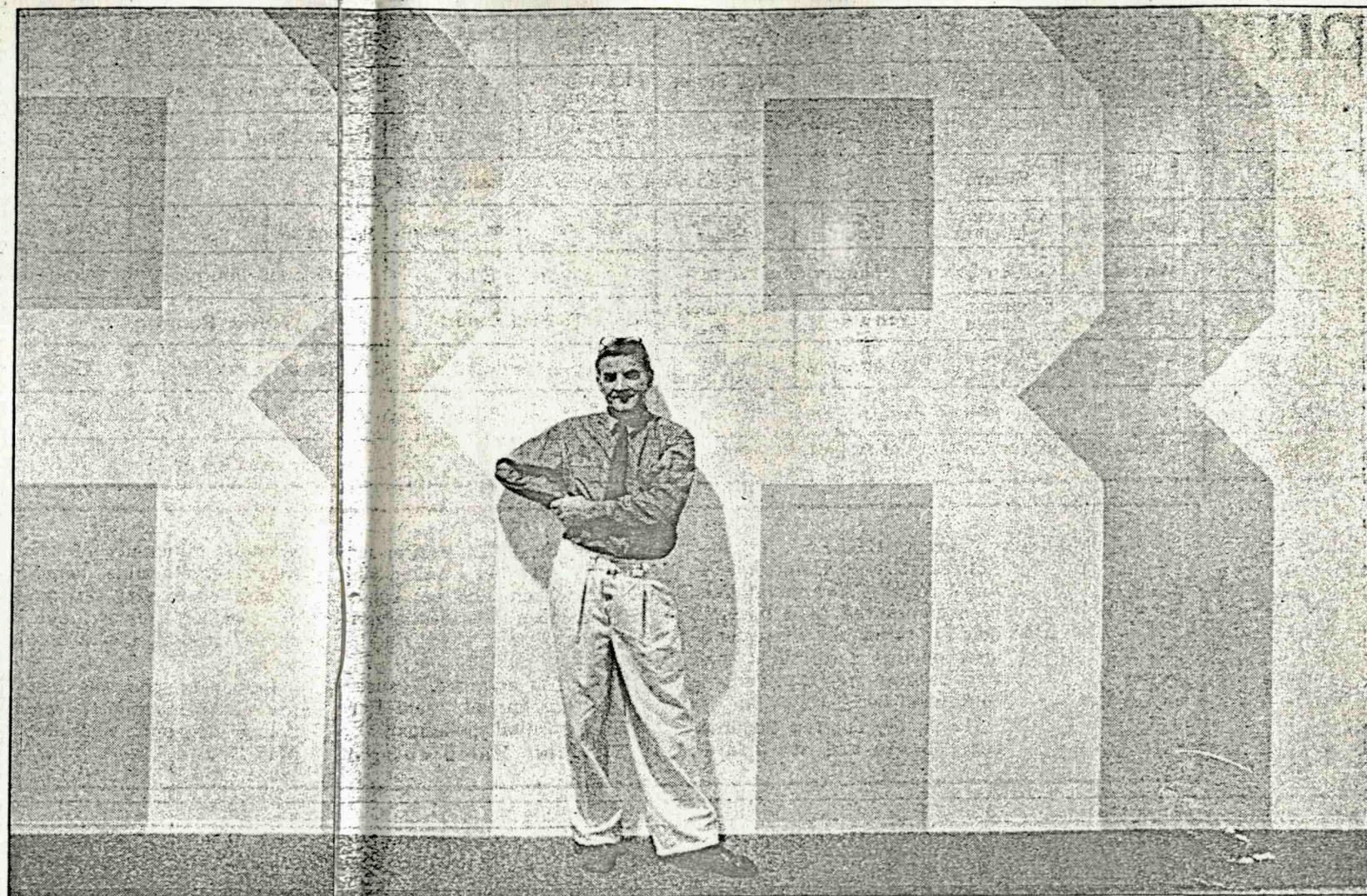
"Then there's the question of what's important when you look at the label. This is the label beside the painting, but the painting is the wall and the label is the shadow."

Superstar Shadow is designed to read as though it were in relief and seen from below. Kennedy has adjusted the boxy typeface by taking out the illusionistic shadows underneath the letters and running them straight to the floor. Without the illusion of a third dimension, the letters come close to abstraction.

"This is a step in modesty," says Kennedy. "The painting is at eye level, a pedestrian level. I think the typeface got its name because it's used on sports jerseys a lot. Of course, the shadow is another step into the realm of modesty."

The graphic flip-flop between abstraction and illusion also is a reference to high art. "You have to work to make it (the lettering) work," says Kennedy, "but you can do it. So that's like a traditional painting game, too: the flat versus the spatial. But you can make it spatial."

Another subtlety of the work



Kennedy is commenting on the consumer power of a name over a product

is its color — the haze grey of ships in the Canadian Navy. It's both camouflage and, for Kennedy, a way of bringing something to Calgary from Halifax (the fleet's East Coast base).

Kennedy worked out the installation in Halifax from a gallery plan and a photograph of the space. Every detail of the work has been carefully considered in relation to the site.

"But that's not its first pur-

pose," he says. "That was work of the '70s — the gallery as a political space. This work is no different from the paintings I made. The work is about what's here and no more. I don't see it as political. It's just making painting."

The work becomes political, of course, in the context of other current art, such as the heroically personal neo-expressionist painting that has created so many superstars lately.

"But," Kennedy says, "it also has to do with who I am, an executive, and all the stuff that passes through my office from the business world. Superstar Shadow relates to that corporate world identity as well."

"I use what's there. The ships in the harbor go by my office; all these things come through my office in the mail. There's no scurrying around to make work. It just comes to you. My name is pretty handy."

In a couple of weeks, *Garry Neill Kennedy: Superstar Shadow* will be obliterated by a fresh coat of white paint, reflecting the short life of art-world star turns in the increasingly rapid turnover of established trends.

"I've been able to stand back and work from the outside," Kennedy says. "I think it's good to stand outside and look into the centre. Of course, you're not on the outside: it's a coy way of dealing with it. It's a position."