

G8 gifts gave leaders a slice of Canada

Ashley Csanady, National Post · Saturday, Jul. 3, 2010

World leaders may have witnessed some impolite protests during last weekend's summits, but they went home with samples of Canadian courtesy.

Gift-giving is a long-standing tradition at the G8 and G20 summits. Host nations are expected to provide "loot bags" that represent the country's culture.

However, after Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi came under fire for lavish presents at the G8 summit in L'Aquila -- Stephen Harper reportedly walked away with a marble-covered art book valued at \$460,000 as well as a monogrammed bathrobe, towels, slippers, linens and leather briefcase -- U.S. President Barack Obama scaled back his swag. At the G20 summit in Pittsburgh last year, local artists and crafts-people were spotlighted, and the Canadian government followed suit with its gift-giving.

G8 leaders took a bit of the boreal forest home with them after attending the G8 summit in Huntsville last week.

Muskoka-based artist Don Thur handcrafted 20 large bowls out of sugar maple for each of the leaders in attendance, including the leaders of 12 countries observing the summit. Ten African agencies in attendance received smaller gifts created by Mr. Thur.

"I'm really truly lucky. I've really been blessed," the artist said. This isn't the first time his work has been given to foreign dignitaries. Queen Elizabeth II, Paul Martin, and George W. Bush are just a few of the notables who have received his carvings.

Bowls similar to the ones presented to the world leaders go for about \$750; however the type of wood can vary the cost. Mr. Thur once sold a piece for \$6,500 because the tree it was made from was recovered from a lake and started growing in 1602. Generally, his pieces sell for between \$150 and \$1,500.

Upon arriving in Toronto for last week's summit, each G20 leader received a landscape-style piece by Ottawabased glass artist Richard Bond.

"It was very exciting, a little bit daunting, maybe a little intimidating," the artist said of being asked to create the gifts.

The pieces the leaders received were almost identical, but like wood grains, no two cuts of Mr. Bond's glass are the same.

Depending on size and intricacy, prices for Mr. Bond's artwork range from \$90 to \$900; however, large or multi-paned pieces such as triptychs can cost thousands of dollars.

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