

Quilt Artist

Who? Me?

As I sewed the label on my latest wall hanging, my own version of a *Newfoundland Quilt* (see *The Canadian Quilter*, Autumn 2008) with my name after the word “Artist,” I smiled to myself. Did I really deserve that title? I’ve tried my hand at different types of fabric art, with varied success, but did that really make me an artist? I’ve sometimes thought of myself as a person with the soul of an artist, the desire to be one, but without much talent.

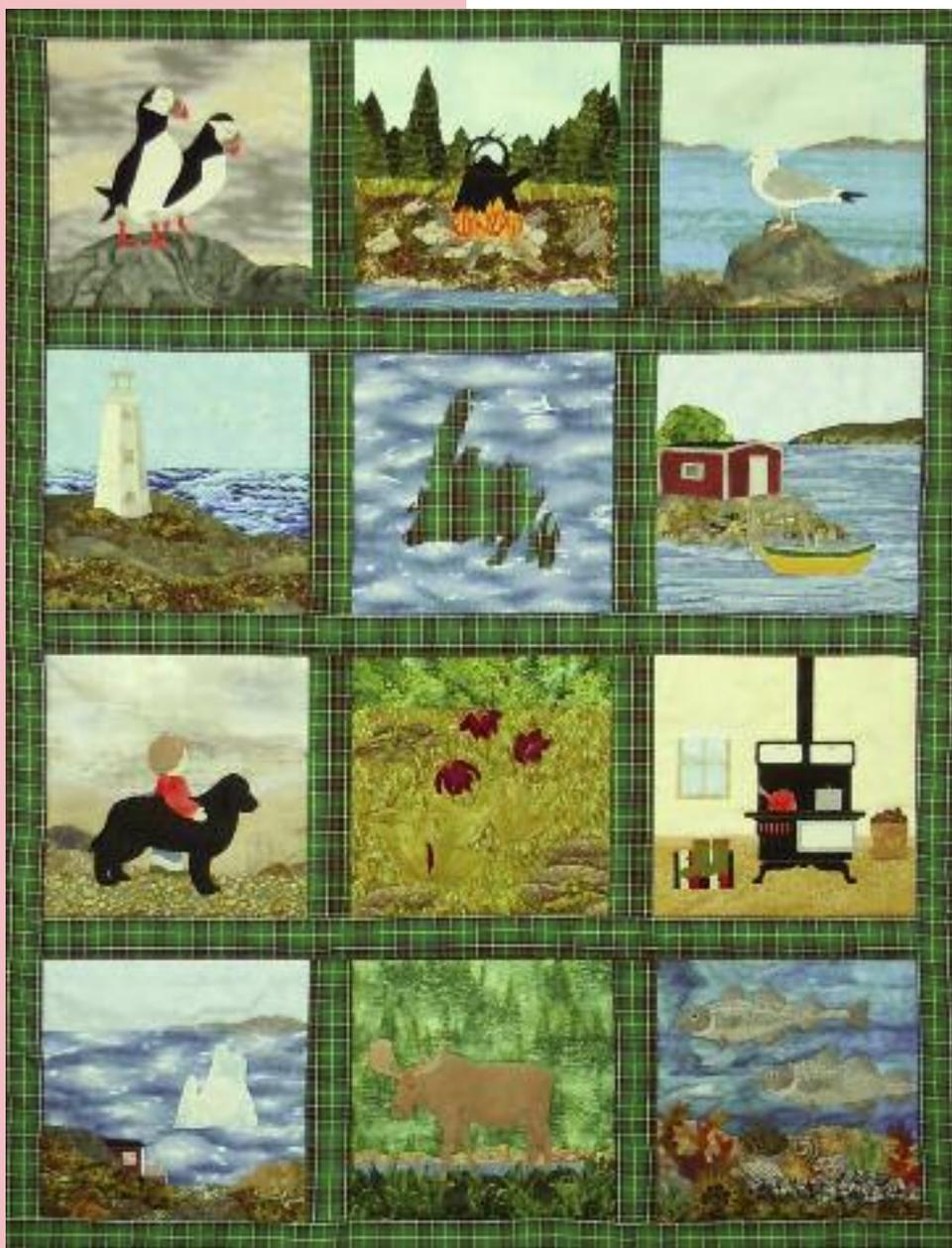


My first awareness of “art” that I can recall came in elementary school days. After a week of “reading, writing and arithmetic,” we looked forward to the relaxed atmosphere of the Friday afternoon “art” classes and the opportunity to draw and colour. Our supplies were minimal, consisting of a green-covered drawing book, a pencil, an eraser and crayons. The very lucky (and better off) students may have had coloured pencils, which were more expensive than the box of eight or ten crayons that, like our other school supplies, we were expected to provide for ourselves.

The teacher, who taught all subjects, no doubt looked forward to Friday afternoons as much as the pupils, and instructions usually consisted of telling us to draw a seasonal picture. So we drew pumpkins for Halloween, snowmen for winter, hearts for Valentine’s Day and so on. Whatever we did was fine and there was no evaluation of our work or competition to see whose drawing was best. Although, even as children, we knew whose work was better than the rest. But it didn’t seem to matter. So I, like most of the other pupils, enjoyed our no-stress art class, or drawing as we called it.

However, there was one class that stands out in my memory. It must have been in grade four or five that we had a student teacher in our classroom, gaining some practical experience. She was given the responsibility of “teaching the art class,” and her lesson consisted of placing a cup and saucer on a table in front of the class for us to draw. The term “still life” was not yet in our vocabulary, but we settled down to do what was expected as best we could.

Now you would think that drawing a cup and saucer, even for a nine- or ten-year old would be a simple assignment. But not so for me. I drew and erased, drew again and erased again, but the best I could do looked more like a home-made boat about to capsize, than a cup and saucer. The saucer in particular eluded all my attempts to produce something recognizable. As my repeated erasures caused my paper to get thinner and thinner, in desperation I raised my hand and asked for help. The kindly student teacher



came to my desk, saw my pitiful effort and with one sweep of her pencil drew a lovely curve under the cup that magically became a saucer. I was in awe! How had she done that? And why couldn't I? As I carefully traced over her line to complete my drawing, the painful realization of artistic talent (and the lack of it) dawned in my mind. She had it. I didn't!

Subsequent years of "drawing" classes in school and later attempts with oil painting, only confirmed in my mind what I had discovered in that art class of years gone by. I had little or no artistic talent. But I wished I had. I envied the creativity of those who could draw and paint and produce lovely works of art.

Then I became a quilter. I didn't have to draw to be able to create something lovely. Patterns, templates, rotary cutters, rulers, the sewing machine and fabrics became my "art supplies." After the completion of each quilt there was a sense of accomplishment and pride that gave me deep satisfaction. Learning new techniques, trying new patterns, even designing my own in the traditional style all added to that satisfaction.

But soon there was a new challenge. Art quilts began to make their way into the world of quilting and the term fibre art was appearing frequently in quilting magazines and at quilt shows. Fibre artists emerged. Landscapes, abstracts, colour-wash and embellishments

of all kinds became, not rarities, but commonplace in the quilting world.

Could I do anything like that? I wondered. Probably not. I just don't have the talent.

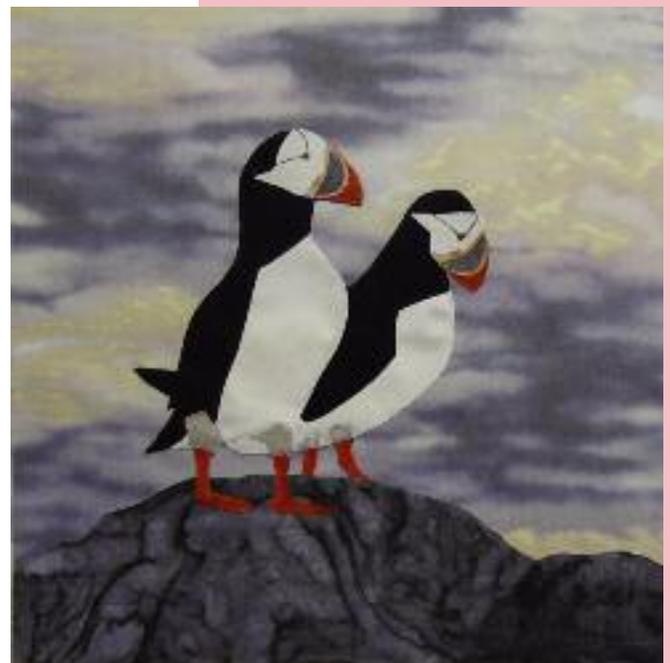
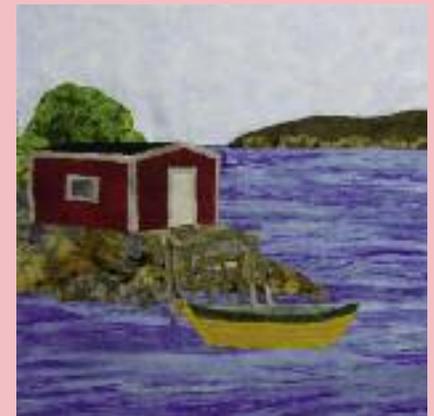
As I lamented that fact to a well-known fibre artist, her reply was a definite challenge. "Talent," she said, "is ninety percent just doing it!"

No more excuses about lack of talent. Just begin and see what you can do. So I did.

I started by making small fabric landscapes. They were such fun that I kept making more and more. With the encouragement of family and friends, I was able to hold a show of my own work.

Since then, although I still make traditional quilts, I have a great deal of pleasure in using fabric to create something untraditional which, by someone with a generous nature, might be called "art." I may not be a great artist, or perhaps by some standards, not even a very good one. But then there are all kinds of artists and all kinds of assessments of art work. It doesn't matter to me. The main thing is that I accepted the challenge, tried something different, and enjoyed the process.

So, I will continue to sew on labels that say "Artist: Ada K. Moyles." But I will still be smiling as I do it!



Check out my blog:
www.thelight-heartedquilter.blogspot.com