

THE DAILY MUSE

BRINGING THE WORK OF ARTISTS TO THE COMMUNITY.



Featured Artist: Emily Durant

By the age of seven Emily Charlotte (Arsenault) Durant felt the stir of the artist within. The crayons she received for Christmas were quickly worn away as she created portraits of people, kittens, and rabbits, and landscapes of her surroundings. Knowing there would be no more crayons until the next Christmas she cut the coloured pictures from the catalogue and rolled the paper into crayon form to draw and colour with. The colour would be much lighter, but it worked and helped the budding artist further develop her skills.

When Durant started to date her future husband Harold, his father, Roy Durant, bought her a set of oil paints and so began her love of oil for the creative process. Though she has worked in other mediums Durant always comes back to oil for its forgiveness and the intensity of colour. Another door of opportunity was to open for the developing artist. She went to work as a maid for Wanda Wyatt, of Summerside, who had a true appreciation of the arts. When Durant's work was done for the day, Miss Wyatt would allow her to use her library with its extensive collection to find inspiration and give expression with coloured pencils. From there she went to work in the studio of Summerside photographer George Wotton colouring black and white photographs.

Married life and mothering three small boys, all of them now artists in their own right, put Durant's painting aspirations on the back burner for a number of years. But the artist within wanted a higher profile, and the universe made way with Durant's meeting of the internationally known artist Georgie Read Barton from whom she began to take lessons. As Durant puts it, Read Barton taught her the finer parts of being a painter, things such as framing, perspective and colouring. "I saw from Read Barton's point of view how art communicates and transcribes the times in which we live." But for Durant what she realized most through Read Barton was that one could get paid for doing something she loved.

Durant said she knew she had succeeded as a painter when she went to view her own painting that was part of a show at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery and found it surrounded by a crowd. Georgie Read Barton was at the front of the crowd on her knees reading the signature to discover who had done the beautiful painting. She was amazed at the shading. Durant also took lessons from

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Island artists Ardis DesBorough and Henry Purdy, as well as Norman Yates of Alberta. She devoured art books and magazines. She participated in more exhibits, of which she has a long list to her credit, and her paintings have sold around the world. Durant loves to receive letters from people who have purchased her art and she garners from their appreciation that they see in her work what she saw as she created and put it out into the world.

It was another coincidence that set her on the teaching path. When one of her sons was eleven his teacher invited her into his classroom to give a talk on drawing with pencil. When she realized she could hold even the attention of the boys and bring forth from them artistic drawings filled with feeling she knew she wanted to teach painting and help people bring out their talent and confidence through the power of learning. Thus, when the family moved to the Evangeline area in 1984 she began her teaching career. One of the things that made her such a popular and successful teacher was the development of her own colour wheel. She taught both children and adults, but she discovered that as she taught she also learned a great deal herself about painting, which further enhanced her own work.

Durant gave up teaching in 2012 after experiencing burnout from sharing so much of herself. For two years she did not paint but turned to gardening to restore her soul. It was healing and gradually she was able to come back to painting. She is planning to create portraits of flowers where she will bring to life the personality and face of flowers, each of which she feels is different. Another opportunity has presented itself to Durant and her husband. Churches began to search them out to repair damaged statues. Her husband does the plaster work while Durant takes up the challenge of matching age-old paints with new paint to make a seamless repair. They are the only ones on Prince Edward Island doing such work.

With over fifty years of painting to her credit Durant states there is nothing she would have done differently with her life. "I thank God for my talent. I never pushed, but rather I was open and receptive and it came towards me. If one has a talent they make use of, they experience happiness. For me, every day is a canvas to be filled."



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