

These days Carol's talent is blooming

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By Paul Dalby, The Independent



In a different century, Carol Paton might have sailed the seven seas with explorers like Cabot and Columbus uncovering the exotic flowers and plants of the New World. Instead Carol sits at a table in her Campbellford house executing the ancient skills of the botanical artist.

No splashy oil paintings or avant garde impressionism here. Each watercolour that the talented artist produces is a precisely accurate rendering of plants that blends science with artistry.

"Botanical art is very detailed and must have the right colour and the right proportions. You don't take artistic licence," Carol, 61, said in an interview.

"Botanical illustrations were originally done as a scientific method of identifying plants," she explained. "Explorers would always take a botanical illustrator with them on their voyages. They were like the equivalent of the camera on-site."

Carol's mastery in her medium has already been recognized in the United States, Canada and Britain. She was awarded the silver medal at the Royal Horticultural Society's prestigious show in Birmingham with her paintings of the provincial and territorial emblems of Canada.

The Buffalo Museum of Science also chose her works for exhibition in two separate shows and Carol Paton paintings were also featured in the International Exhibition of Botanical Art in Pittsburgh.

"I love the design layout and colour sense of botanical art," said Carol, whose works are in many private and public collections. "The painting doesn't have to be stiff just because it's a botanical illustration. The way I overlay leaves is more artistic."

Wherever possible Carol works from actual plants and flora and takes up to three weeks to complete one of her lustrous pictures. This includes many hours of library research beforehand

"I always work on two or three paintings at the same time," she said. "I keep adding layers and layers of water colours and washes of colour on each painting until I'm satisfied."

A native of Uxbridge, Carol Paton came honestly by her artistic aspirations - her father ran a hardware store but was happiest doing his sign-painting sideline while her mother was an accomplished artist in oils.

"I was always interested in art, I even illustrated all my notes at school," she said. "I have been drawing since I was 3 or 4. I was colouring as soon as I could hold something.

"At high school I had a good art teacher and he encouraged all of us who wanted to, to go to art school," Carol said.

Carol took her art teacher's advice and enrolled at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto for a four-year course in advertising art.

But her newly-minted diploma did not immediately translate in the kind of art work she had envisaged.

"My first job was for Irwin Toys, making the screens for painting velvet cushions like Elvis and Niagara Falls," she with an embarrassed laugh. "Every time we arrived for work we stamped our feet to scare off the rats. I did that work for a couple of years until I couldn't stand it any longer."

Subsequent forays led her into work as an illustrator for advertising companies and also newspaper ads, shop window displays and then a 10-year stint creating designs for major wallpaper manufacturers - she even had a book of her designs published.

"Then wallpaper went out of fashion and only a couple of companies made it through, the rest just disappeared. Faux finishing paint killed us," she said.

Fate dealt her a kind card. She now had the time and opportunity to concentrate on her first love - flowers.

"I started painting flowers in 1994. I got really fascinated, bought some books and taught myself. I just kept going from there."

Her exquisitely fine painting style soon won major recognition. She was chosen as featured artists by the Niagara parks Commission's Botanical Gardens

After she joined the American Society of Botanical Artists "I just got hooked, I was mesmerized by the painting," she said.

She was particularly inspired by the career of one of history's greatest botanical artists Pierre-Joseph Redoute. "He was a trailblazer, Carol said. "Redoute illustrated all the roses owned by Marie Antoinette. She had a huge collection and that was his job to paint everything."

Redoute was not only a great painter but a pretty good escape artist too. He survived the French revolution and the Guillotine and after the Reign of Terror, Redoute simply transferred his services to Napoleon's Empress Josephine.

Carol Paton's life at the easel is a good deal less dangerous than that. She's just happy to be relieved of the cooking chores at home, a task that's skillfully managed by her actor husband Tony.

Carol Paton's paintings have graced the pages of the Canadian Gardening magazine and the National Ballet's home in the Hummingbird centre in Toronto. Now she is exploring the idea of releasing limited edition prints of her work.

"But most of all I would love to go back to the Royal Horticultural Society show in England and this time win the gold medal," she said with a twinkle of the eye.

Anyone who wants to see Carol's paintings can visit the artist at home at 32 Canrobert Street, Campbellford by appointment. Call 705-653-1091

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