

Artists Carrole and Brian Blakeman: different paths, similar ambitions

By Constance Scrafield

When two artists live together as a married couple, there is every chance for mutual support and encouraging forays into challenging work.

So it is with Carrole and Brian Blakeman, both deeply engaged in their diverse art, both steeped in the pursuit of knowledge and their own progress into new directions.

Ms. Blakeman came to Canada from England early in life, went to art camps and found herself involved and concentrating on many art forms. She settled on pottery, establishing her own pottery business in 1983, called Fireworks in Belfountain.

Twenty years of pottery, including 10 years showing her pieces in the Signature Show in Toronto, eased to an end as her ambition to do more moved her full time into textile and, now in particular, the fabulous Japanese art of Shibori, or indigo dying.

Attending the Haliburton School of the Arts since the 1980s with studies that centred on textiles, Ms. Blakeman has been fascinated by the tactility of fabric.

To study seriously, she took an intensive one-year course at Haliburton in four months: the Fibre Arts Certification Program.

‘It was a lot more intense than I thought,’ she said. ‘They were 12-hour days of steady work, with deadlines and lesson plans. I learned a lot about myself as an artist, working side by side with 20-year-old students in a way I hadn’t done since university.’

Her studies resulted in her receiving an award for achievement. When the Dean was giving her the award, she commented, ‘It took courage for you to do this course.’ On reflection, Ms. Blakeman concurred.

The use of indigo goes back a thousand years that is known and is part of ancient cultures around the world. Perhaps the strangeness of it and its ‘magic’ contribute to its extreme long-term popularity.

It begins with the indigo vat. The indigo itself comes as a ‘cake’ and forms the basis of the vat. The indigo is fermented in a variety of ways over some time and heated. Natural fibres only, such as silk, cotton, linen, rayon, each of which absorbs the dye differently, can be used. The unpredictability of the indigo dye, combined with the folding, tying and stitching, which are the resistants that create white patterns within the indigo blue, has captivated Ms. Blakeman and challenges her irresistibly.

The magic of the indigo is the process at the end.

‘You put the material into the indigo,’ she told us, ‘and when you take it out, it is green. Then, it turns blue in reaction to the exposure to oxygen. Everybody who witnesses it just thinks it’s quite a magical process.’

Basically, Ms. Blakeman’s indigo work can found on Facebook at Copper Fox Design, as well as Instagram at [#copperfoxdesign04](#) for a start to see her beautiful studio line of scarves, shawls and home decor items she creates for sale. She also creates art pieces on consignment.

A 30-year career in ‘all aspects of the decorative design field’ in England eventually brought Mr. Blakeman to Canada, where he ‘launched his own freelance design company.’ Added to his arts background are his ‘awareness and involvement with environmental issues.’ This combined, brought ‘a more sympathetic understanding to my landscape paintings.’

A watercolour artist for years, he eventually began to prefer working in acrylic and gouache to mixed media. For years, he painted in, more or less, a traditional way, but living as he and Carrole do, on a Mono horse farm, he is beginning to see nature at its soul, seeing the whole tree ‘underneath the land as well what is readily visible.’

‘My new work has developed quite a bit,’ he said. ‘I’m working now on black – a lot of my pen and ink work has lead me to create in the negative: white line on black rather than black lines on white. Now, I’m adding colour.’

He began to explain the foundation of his work: ‘It’s (the painting) a feeling – not what I see outside. It’s the spirit of what’s out there, the rhythm of the landscape, what’s going on below it.’

‘I can feel it happening,’ he added.

We had to remark that this was him returning to his ancient Celtic roots, given their belief that humanity is integrally a part of nature and the spirit world. And he agreed. Moving forward in history, he remarked on the work of Rennie Mackintosh and William Morris.

‘They knew line and design inside the way I feel within the landscape,’ he said. ‘It’s all so dependent on each other.’

Living on the farm has imbued Mr. Blakeman with the flow of landscape and nature.

‘I know it – the beauty of living in this landscape. It’s a bit sexy,’ he commented. ‘It’s flowing, how one part follows the other . . .’

Talking a bit about the way he prices his art, he said, ‘People ask me how I can sell my paintings so reasonably and I tell it’s because I want people to buy, to have them in their homes. I’m painting on canvas so I can sell quite reasonably. I feel that’s a sharing.’

For more information about Mr. Blakeman’s work, his email is birdmanblakeman47@gmail.com