



Angela Brown/Central Plains Herald/Leader

As she approaches her 80th year, Portage la Prairie artist Marguerite Ruddell continues to be active in the local arts community. (Inset) Ruddell's painting of a strikingly beautiful Kingfisher.

Art better with age

BY ANGELA BROWN
CENTRAL PLAINS HERALD-LEADER

Reds, blues, greens. Every colour on paper adds to the continuous canvas that embodies Marguerite Ruddell's work.

With each passing year, her narrative grows bigger and becomes part of the world she absorbs. She leaves her personal creations flung wide open, like a diary that suddenly appears on the coffee table. A personal story for each passerby to see and share.

"I find art is a tremendous communicator. It touches all people, and it enriches their lives," she said on a warm day in May as she busied herself with her art.

Inside her small Portage la Prairie bungalow, Ruddell dabbed her brush in the blue paint, filling in the sky with light and cloud, filling the void.

This was a painting for her upcoming exhibit on bird life. She will add some water-fowl later, to make her nature creation complete.

Ruddell is 78 now and looking forward to her 80th birthday celebration. She will mark the occasion with an exhibition of her work at the Portage and District Arts Centre on Aug. 1, 2010. The theme will be Birds, Flowers and More.

"It's a double celebration," Ruddell said, excitedly. "We'll be taking over the building, the (William) Glesby (Centre) and the arts centre."

"It's going to be quite a weekend with my granddaughter married on Saturday in the Glesby Centre," she added.

Since she was a young girl, Ruddell has let art consume her life, although she did not fully pursue her gift until her later years. Today, her paintings hang in private and corporate collections across Canada, the United States, England and Japan.

Ruddell studied with world-renowned



wildlife artists the late Clarence Tillenius and the late Jack Hassard, who was involved in starting the Portage Arts Centre, as well as other artists in the media of oils, acrylic, egg tempera, pen and ink, and watercolour.

One of her first exhibits was in 1975 at the Portage Industrial Exhibition, and she later put on a solo exhibit in 1984 at the city's art gallery.

The talented artist has also received her fair share of awards, including first prize for a pencil sketch in 1975; and first and second placings in the Burrows Trail art show in a professional watercolour class in 1993. Her pictures were chosen for various juried arts shows between 1980 and 2000. In 1994, one piece was selected to tour in the Central Region Juried Art Exhibition.

Teaching her craft has also been a great part of Ruddell's life. She has been teaching art to students at the Herman Prior 55-plus Centre since 2002, and at the Portage and District Arts Centre in 2006.

As well, in 2002, she published a history of the arts centre's first 25 years. In the past, Ruddell has also served as director of the Portage and District Arts Council, on its exhibition committee, as well as director on the PDAC board. At the Celebration of the Arts dinner and art auction in May, she was recognized as the 2009 honorary life member with the Portage and District Arts Council.

Originally from the Parkland region of Manitoba, Ruddell moved to Portage in about 1960, where her talent flourished.

"I have always had an interest in art," she said. "I doodled as a child."

For the past 20 years, Ruddell has been teaching others about her craft and finding and releasing the artist that has been dormant there. Her talent as an artist has inspired many of her students. At the 28th Annual Central Region Juried Art Exhibition

held in Portage on May 29, five of her students' pieces were entered in the show, and Debbie Drain's painting "Mom's Mixer" was selected to tour.

Drain has been taking classes with Ruddell for about two years at the Herman Prior 55-plus Centre.

"I didn't know a thing until I went to her class. She is an excellent teacher," Drain said. "The more you do, the more you pick up from other people. It is the techniques she has taught us. She lets us pick our own subjects, and she will help us. Anybody can do whatever they want."

Marilyn Arnold Jasper, who participated in the juried art show for her second time, started taking art classes with Ruddell in January 2007 at the Prior Centre. She appreciates Ruddell's sensitivity not only to her art, but to the needs of the students she teaches. Ruddell helped alleviate some stress for Arnold Jasper by offering her personal help when she needed it.

"I had just had breast cancer surgery, so I was taking the course, and I got some very specialized attention," Arnold Jasper said. "My arm was so shaky that she would teach me at her house on a Saturday instead of in the class. So, it was very good. I had some privacy and some individual attention."

Arnold Jasper said Ruddell brings out the true artist in her students. "Basically, she allows you to be yourself and to experiment," she said.

Michelle Lalancette, from Portage, whose work was entered in the juried art show, studied with Ruddell for a year about five years ago.

"I had just retired, and a friend said, 'There are painting classes at the Herman Prior,'" she said. "I said, 'I am too young to go to the Herman Prior.' I went, and Marguerite just inspired me and inspired me. Even now, even though I don't paint with Marguerite in

her classes, every painting I do I take over to her for her to suggest whatever. If I run into trouble, I always go back to Marguerite. She is my total mentor."

Arts centre manager Jean Armstrong presented Ruddell with the honorary life membership. She said Ruddell has helped other artists find their gifts, and their voice in their work.

"We did that to honour her for her years and years of volunteerism, and sharing her art and her skills with Portage la Prairie," said Armstrong.

"She brings her love of nature and certainly her love of animals. What she brings to the students is a generosity of spirit and a kindness for sharing."

On contemplating turning 80, Ruddell said she won't stop pursuing her art or her desire to teach others the beauty they can discover on their own canvas.

"I hope, in teaching classes, they will learn to love the visual arts, the creativity. Art is a form of self expression and excellent therapy in some cases," she said. "I learn a lot from my students, and it gives you a good feeling; the volunteering."

The talented artist continues to look for beauty in the natural world and uses that for her craft.

"I really focus on nature," Ruddell said. "It is where I was raised. I spent many hours on horseback in the wilderness and learned to observe a lot of wildlife. I also am interested in more modernistic art. I like all forms of art, (but) I keep coming back to flowers and nature."

"I have done considerable travelling and was very interested in what you can draw from it, all over Manitoba, the Yukon, England, the East Coast and West. I draw wherever I go," she said.

"The visual arts have always been a part of my life."