



Introduction to the Visual Art Archives

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One can speak poetry just by arranging colours well. – Vincent van Gogh

On occasion, I am asked what it is about me that makes me an artist, whether as a writer of prose and poetry, a singer-songwriter, or a visual artist. I even ask myself these kinds of questions. Sometimes I have to wonder where these abilities come from; whence comes the inspiration for this or that subject to write, sing, or paint; how do I summon up the wherewithal to create a piece of art at any given time. These are not easy questions to answer, but I believe it important to answer them sufficiently, if only for personal development and self-understanding.

Whenever I pursue such questions, I am always amazed by how quickly the actual skills and talents themselves come up short as viable answers. The skills it takes to be a good writer of prose or poetry, to write and perform a good original song, or to paint a landscape are fundamental to being an artist, of course. But they are not where the art ‘comes from’, or why I take to the business of creativity so readily and relatively easily. They are, in fact, tertiary to the matter. Even my heart and mind, the composite creative spirit behind the skills that drive them, are only secondary to it.

Invariably, it all boils down to one primary, inescapable trait – I am chronically interested in human life and all that it contains. This means I am always paying attention and, apparently, I have been doing this from an early age. I see this sometimes when I am writing, sometimes when making music. But never more so than when I am creating visual art. If I start painting a sky, for instance, I soon realize how intensely I have been paying attention to the sky over the course of my life. It is as though I have arrived at the canvas prepared and already somewhat familiar with the details. If I am

photographing a scenic landscape, looking for the balance in the shot, when I think about it, I can only conclude that I have always been looking for the balance in everything for all my life. It can all be traced back to my unremitting interest in the nuts and bolts of human life, naturally leading me to being truly thankful for the attention I have always paid, attention that is now paying off in every artistic genre I work.

If I could contribute one new word to the English language it would be ‘interestual’, of which I am certainly one. I know that being interested is the origin of my abilities as an artist, and it was key to my survival during the dark years. No matter how depressed, I would still wonder what’s coming next and look forward to finding out. What’s more, an interested student graduates a well-educated student because if you are interested in something you will never forget it. This has been my experience with education and life in general. Now, in my sixties, I have built up a storehouse of special knowledge that is an inexhaustible resource I draw on as an artist.

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I came upon visual art quite innocently in February of 2017, about two months after I quit drinking. We were spending time with some friends in the Toronto area, and the wife of a new friend I met there was an acrylic painter who liked to paint when she went to the cottage in Muskoka. I happened to say that I had always wanted to try my hand at painting, and she readily offered me the canvas, paints, and brushes to do so. With nothing immediately presenting itself as subject matter, my thoughts drifted back to Newfoundland, and to Branch in particular. I decided to try painting the view from our house on the beach from memory.

As you can see below, it is a pretty basic rendering, but not too terrible. I was encouraged by this first piece, enough to be cautiously optimistic about what might happen if I bought some art supplies of my own and continued painting at home. But it was so much more than a ‘nice first try’, and a great deal of good came into my life from this happenstance. The physio-psycho-spiritual benefits I experienced in the act of painting that first day was truly life-changing; it was a pivotal discovery, and a very real epiphany that I know will be with me for the rest of my life.

From the instant I put brush and paint to blank canvas, the world and everything in it just fell away – and it took me with it! My subjective ego, type-A personality, hopes and dreams, worries, my very self – all vanished in that moment. All that was formerly me was off somewhere having a rejuvenating rest I had never known, and what remained became lost as a mere aspect, an ingredient, at most a conduit in this beautiful new world that had suddenly opened up for me. My body became a seemingly independent method-facilitating tool that knew how to do what I did not. My all was

completely caught up in the process of creation, and everything I had been just five seconds before that initial moment had been utterly transcended – I was at one with the activity.

I was so immersed and engrossed, it wasn't until after the piece was finished, returning to reality to step back from the easel an hour or so later, that I realized what had just happened to me. Looking back later, and even now, it is like an out-of-body experience, as I marvel at how these eyes and hands, working in a raw symbiotic harmony, seemed to already know how to work together to some extent, and knew just what to do and when. This was particularly evident in my purely instinctive approach to the difference in the colour and texture of the sky versus the ocean.

But right there, at that moment, standing before the piece in a daze I blankly mumbled: “**First Foray**” ...



Though it is more than a little rough around the edges, I was guardedly pleased with the result. But the health-value of the act of painting itself turned out to be a

perfectly productive means of escape for me, unlike some other things I have tried over the years. This only scratches the surface of the benefits that continue to return to me out of my work in visual art, which are key contributing factors to any measure of happiness and fulfillment I am fortunate enough to enjoy in the years I have left to me. And it may well add to their number. The original **First Foray** now rests on a prominent shelf in my home office, and here it kicks off my acrylic painting archive.

This was how I got my start as an acrylic painter. As you will see in the archives, my facility with acrylic paint developed relatively quickly. It also led to working with other elements and other types of visual art, including mixed media (see mixed media archive); and it reawakened a nascent interest in others that I had left behind in childhood, like sketching and drawing (see sketches and drawings archive). It wasn't long before I realized that photography was yet another visual art medium that I have been working in and should be included here (see photography archive). Many of my photographs have been recognized for their quality in terms of light, balance and perspective, and all future requests by members for mounted prints will be addressed through this website.

For the artist, everything seen, heard and experienced is relevant. It is all fodder for art. This is most obvious in the visual arts, but no less true or vital in making music and writing. Absolutely everything is potentially a subject for a work of art or could possibly contribute to the expression of something more complex. It produces meaningful works of art, obviously, but it also grounds the artist her/himself in the here and now. The world around the artist, without and within, is alive and pregnant with meaning. You simply must be present to have an artist's vision and commitment; and being present is a highly desirable state of mind for which millions are striving nowadays, and for good reason. I believe this is the most beautiful and all-encompassing feature of the artist's life, and I treasure it every day. Of course, the best way to treasure it is to use it – the central joy in the true artist's life.

Thank you for your time and attention to the opening remarks of the visual art archives, and to everything else I have to offer my members across the full ***A Branch of the Arts*** website. Please visit often and enjoy. I look forward to any questions or comments you may have by email, on the site's Facebook page which I am using as an interactive blog, or by Facebook Messenger.

Peace.

A stylized signature in blue ink. The letter 'J' is large and prominent, with the 'K' and 'elland' written in a cursive script to its right. The 'R' is smaller and positioned between the 'J' and 'K'. The signature reads 'Jeff R. Kelland'.