

The Visual Arts Archive

Section 3: Pencil Sketches and Charcoal Drawings

*"Drawing is the basis of art. A bad painter cannot draw.
But one who draws well can always paint."
– Arshile Gorky*

The only visual art I created before seriously turning to it in my late 50s was drawing/sketching as a boy. I'm told I was reasonably good at capturing the essence of my subjects for portrait drawings (family and friends), but I dropped it around the time my father taught me to play guitar, which was more useful in attracting girls. My sketching abilities didn't come back into play until I started acrylic painting, using sketches to plan out the pieces. The first time I did so, I was amazed by how much I retained from my juvenile years.

My first sketch as an adult came on a trip to Montreal for a long weekend in 2017. Everybody else went shopping on Saturday, and I stayed home at the rental. For some reason I decided to try some freehand sketching. Still life seemed to be the best approach and, looking around the living room, my eyes settled on a white bowl of bananas. Again, I was stunned by how easy it was to reawaken my rudimentary childhood sketching skills, and it took no more than 15–20 minutes to complete...



The only other sketch I did as an adult was done in 2020, soon after moving into our new home in Miramichi, New Brunswick. I've always loved birch trees, but they are few and far between in Newfoundland. Thankfully, they're much more plentiful in New Brunswick, and one of them holds a special place in my heart.

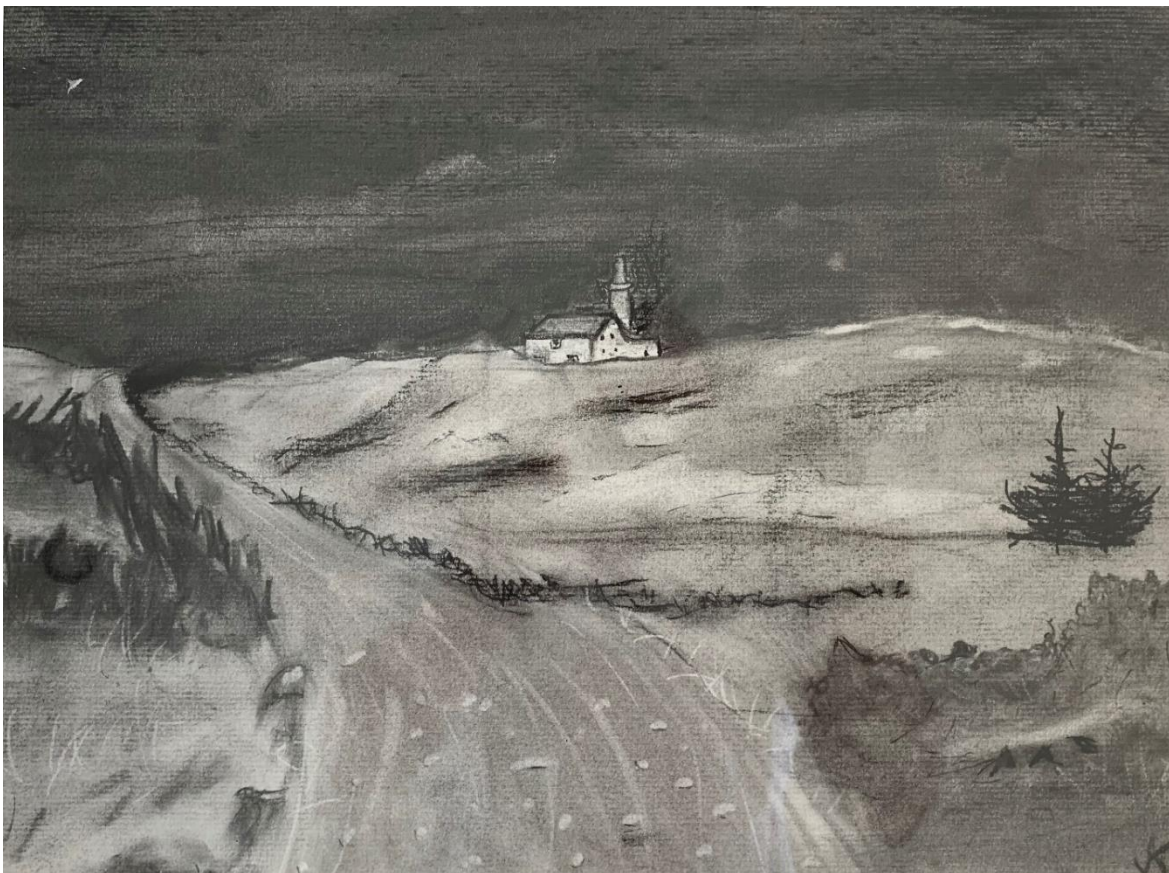
When we came to view the property initially, an A-frame and a full acre right on the Miramichi River, a mature birch tree stood proudly in the open by itself, centered on the land nearer the river. My love of birch is so strong that it felt like the tree was welcoming me personally to our new home, and it continues to be a daily source of peace and joy. By the time we bought the house and moved in, it was October, and the deciduous birch was almost bare. Soon thereafter I sketched it for the first time, calling it *Welcome*, and I'm sure it will be the subject of future drawings and paintings...



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I have been a writer and musician for as long as I can remember, starting both in my childhood. But at the time of writing the text for this section of the archives, I was barely five years working in visual art. There had been a good deal of experimenting with artistic genres and different media, and there will be more in the future as I try to find out where my natural abilities might lie, which areas require more work, and what visual art activities I do and do not enjoy performing. Though I had never tried drawing with charcoal, it has always intrigued me, and some pieces I have seen by others are especially dynamic with their own unique appeal.

I decided to contact veteran St. John's visual artist, Randy Blunden, who works very well with charcoal, and I spent a few hours in his studio to learn the ropes. Randy is a fine man with lots of patience, and I learned a lot. ***Behind the Ferryland Lighthouse*** is my very first charcoal drawing, which was started in Randy's studio and finished at home. It is a charcoal drawing of a picture of the Ferryland lighthouse, approaching the site from behind...



A few weeks later I did my second charcoal drawing, *Charcoal Moon*, with the view from the beach house on a beautiful moonlit night as the subject...



Flawed? Oh, yes. But I still like it, and I think charcoal on paper is an excellent medium for moonlight.

I came away from this one with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was discovering that working with charcoal is something I didn't much enjoy doing; yet on the other, I wanted to do a better job with charcoal on the moonlit view from the beach house, before laying it aside indefinitely.

The following week I approached *Charcoal Moon II* with a fresh attitude, and with the benefit of having done it once before. I also realized that the view is more imposing than shown in the first version, so I did this one on a sheet oversized charcoal sketching paper, with a portrait rather than a landscape orientation...

