



Q & A with *Debbie Brady*



Local artist Debbie Brady uses macro photography to create stunning textural abstract art that celebrates a miniature Island landscape hidden in a small section of oyster shell. Each piece includes a photo of the entire shell highlighting the tiny section portrayed and the title names the shore where the shell was harvested.

www.oysterart.ca

Q. How long have you been creating this art form? It's such a unique idea - how did you get started?

I began taking photography classes in 2013. Being a curious, detail-oriented person it wasn't long before I gravitated to using a macro lens, much like a scientist uses a microscope, to examine things closely.

My 'happy place' is walking along the shore so collecting beach treasures comes naturally. In 2016 I was using my macro lens to check out some of my treasure when I saw what was hidden from casual view in an oyster shell. I was totally impressed seeing something extraordinarily new in something so familiar! It took me three years of collecting, cataloging, photographing and assessing the idea before I developed a plan to launch an "Oyster Art" collection in a way that would garner the attention oysters deserve. The photographer Ansel Adams best said it for me "I work to transform curiosity into art."

Q. What inspires you?

Photography energizes me with its infinite number of possibilities and technical challenges. When I'm examining shells with my macro lens and eventually find one with breathtaking character I have goosebumps composing the shot. That moment of discovery creates the same reaction every single time for me. The coloured cervices in an oyster shell are one of those easily and often overlooked things that nature has so fantastically created. When I find them I feel compelled to capture them in all their glorious detail.

Q. Have you always been a working artist?

I heard a term recently that would describe me as a *seniorpreneur*. I graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing Degree from Dalhousie University but left that profession to raise a family. I taught elementary school for six years then eventually I returned to studies

by attending Holland College's Visual Communications program. I now have over 20 years experience as a graphic designer at my home-based studio Graphically Speaking. It has involved directing many photo shoots for print and online projects which led to my interest in learning to use a DSLR camera. I have been very fortunate to receive awards for my work early on in this pursuit.

Q. Explain briefly how you create your art.

I spend a lot of time traveling around the Island collecting a wide range of shells from different locations. Many are found by scouring shorelines.

Because not every shell is photogenic I need many of them to examine. Basically, I use a 100mm Macro lens with one or two sets of extension tubes attached to allow me to get closer to the shell than the lens alone will allow. I have a ring flash attached to the front of the lens to shine light on the shell which is in a shadow cast from the camera being so close to it. The camera body is attached to a digitized focusing rail which allows the focus point to change by minute increments. Depending on the depth of the shell's textured surface a photo may require almost 30 shots of the one small area being photographed. Each one will have small portions in focus. They are then combined to create a single significantly in-focus image which still needs manual inspection and editing. Once I'm satisfied with that step then begins the creative development in a digital darkroom to create the final artwork.

Q. How can someone see or buy your work? Is your art available in any other galleries or studios?

As an emerging artist I was fortunate to have the PEI Government Art Bank purchase two pieces to have on display in public buildings. Also this past summer I had three pieces of Oyster Art on display, and of course for sale, at The Dunes Art Galley

in Brackley. My portfolio of work, pricing and directions to place an order are available at www.oysterart.ca. Additionally I have a gallery in my home in Tyne Valley (795 Canada Rd) which is open by chance and by appointment.

Q. Are you working on any new art forms or ideas?

I have so many ideas and plans running through my mind that I would like to explore.

To celebrate Oyster Art's first anniversary in October a 1/1 (one of one) Pearl Series was launched. These artworks will only have a single printing in the size and substrate (archival paper, canvas or acrylic) chosen by the client and they will also receive the shell used to create it.

Also the result of inquiries I have just added doing commissioned pieces. There are so many Islanders with familial contact with the oyster industry. A special memory would be created by having one of their shell's used for their very own piece of Oyster Art just. Hopefully supplying me with 24 or so would include a photogenic candidate!

I would like to help raise the profile of the Island's oyster fishery by creating a large format coffee table book that celebrates our Malpeque oysters by featuring Oyster Art created from shells sourced from around the province, information about those locations, oyster aquaculture and the oysters themselves.

During my trips to many shorelines other types of shells including mussel and quahogs have been added to my collection. I've been asked if I will have considered photographing other types of shells. I admit to collecting mussel and quahog shells that have caught my eye but for now oysters have my full attention.