

features



DRAWN *from* nature

A St. John's artist is bringing local scenes
to life in a creative and colourful way.

BY LINDA BROWNE

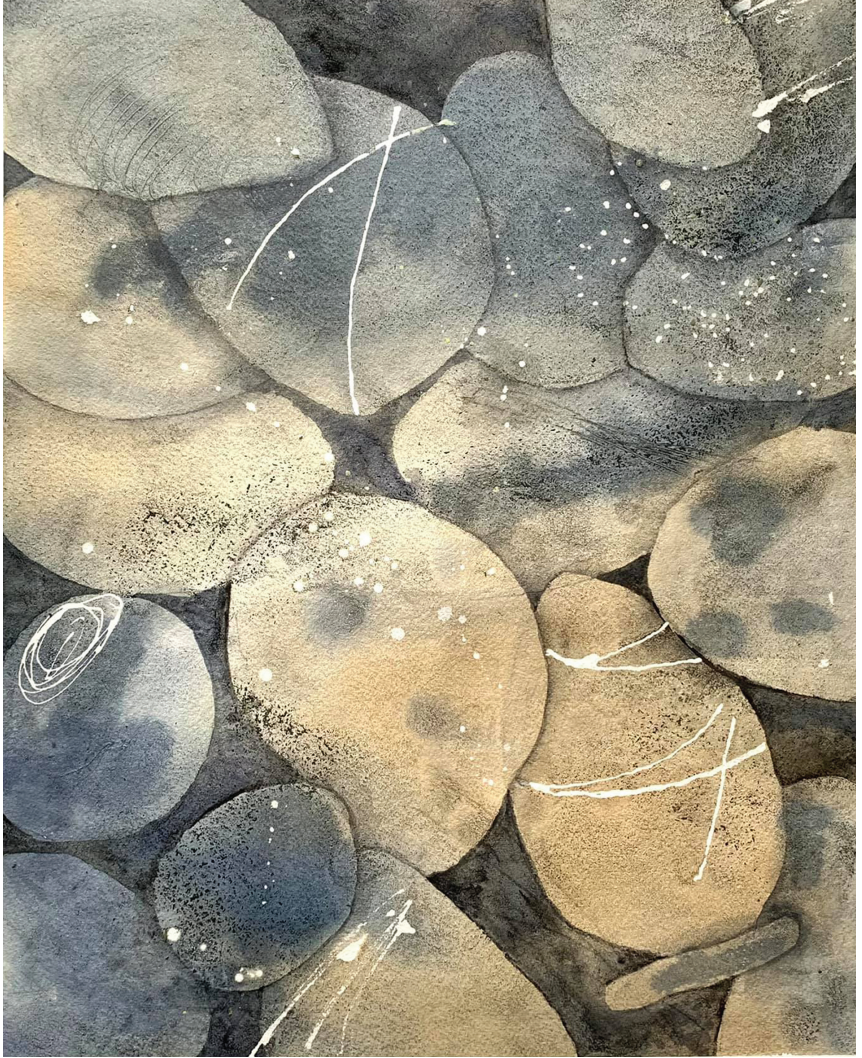


Newfoundland and Labrador is an artist's dream.

With gorgeous coastal landscapes and an impressive array of plants and wildlife, there's more inspiration here than you can shake a paintbrush at. One local artist is bringing these beautiful scenes to life in a wild and wonderful way – foraging for flowers and berries to make her own botanical inks.

A Fresh Perspective

Take a look through Lindsay Alcock's Instagram page (@oldtroutstudio) and you'll find sketches and paintings of curious crows, fishing sheds and stages, colourful jellybean row houses, and beach rocks and pebbles in hues of purple, blue, green and grey that upon first glance look so real, you'd swear they were photographs.



The level of skill on display might make you think she's been practising for decades, but Lindsay, 55, began drawing and painting just five years ago. And while she's always enjoyed the arts, she "never really did anything with drawing and painting because I honestly didn't think that I could," she says. But as her two sons grew older and she found herself with extra time on her hands, Lindsay began watching YouTube videos to learn the craft, eventually settling on watercolour as her main medium.

She also tried printmaking, apprenticing under celebrated local visual artist Scott Goudie.

Eventually, Lindsay started selling some of her work at local markets and doing commissions, "just really enjoying making art and being able to make art for the first time in my life," she says. But it wasn't until she moved from just outside the city to downtown St. John's two years ago that her senses were awakened to a new way of creating.

"I'm walking in the park and there's

Lindsay is always experimenting with different plants and berries to create ink for her artwork.



all these big berries and I thought, ‘Oh God, they’re so amazing... I wonder what I can do with these?’ And at the same time, my best friend had given me this beautiful bouquet as a housewarming gift and it had these purple gladiolus, and I’m thinking, ‘I’ve never seen that colour in a water-colour. I wonder what would happen if I tried to get a colour out of it?’”

She did some research and experimented with the flower, with pleasantly surprising results. “When it went on paper it was purple, but it dried green – and I’m like, that is the weirdest thing, and that is the coolest thing. Why is that happening and what would happen with other ingredients?” Lindsay says.

So she turned her attention to the Saskatoon berries, “and they turned into this amazing magenta. It was

just gorgeous. And after that I was hooked. Everywhere I went I was carrying plastic baggies so I could pick something up along the way,” Lindsay laughs.

Branching Out

Since then, Lindsay (who creates and sells her work under the name “Old Trout Studio”) has made botanical inks out of everything from the buttercups in her backyard and clover from the top of the stairs at Mary Brown’s Centre, to blueberries, partridgeberries, raspberries, chuckley pear, wild iris and more. “Wild iris is absolutely my favourite colour that I’ve ever pulled. It’s this beautiful periwinkle,” Lindsay says. She also hopes to branch out with other materials, such as bark and chaga mushrooms.

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“I actually took a trip to Fogo and Twillingate and Moreton’s Harbour last summer and collected 25 bags of various ingredients. Everywhere that I’m walking or hiking, I’ll find something. Berries and flowers are usually the best. They have the most pigment in them, so it’s easier to draw from those. I used acorns once, like acorns that had been on the ground all through the winter, so they were kind of gross by the time the spring came around, but they gave a gorgeous colour,” she says.

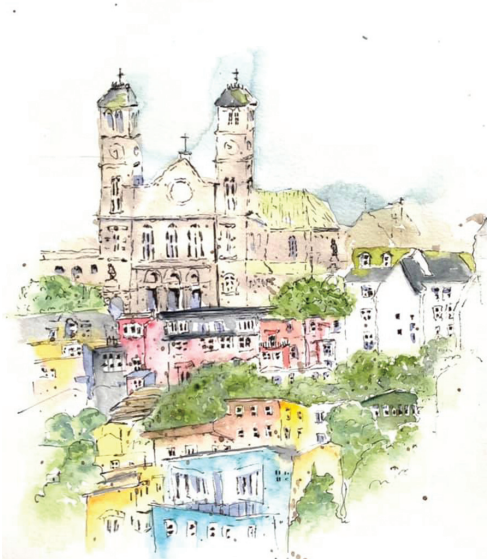
Once Lindsay has collected her ingredients, she’ll simmer them in water and mash them down with a muller before eventually straining them and adding a mordant, which makes the ink more colourfast and changes its colour. “It’s like fireworks. It’s just amazing when you add that. It’s so exciting because you never know what colour you’re going to get,” she says. She then adds some honey, to make the ink more viscous and easier to work with on paper, and a bit of essential oil, which acts as a preservative.

“Half my fridge is actually full of inks,” Lindsay laughs. Each ink container is carefully labelled so she knows the ingredients, and when and where she collected them.

Painting with botanical inks is a dynamic and unpredictable process that requires practice and patience, as the colours react not only to the mordant, but also to the paper and each other when they blend together.

“So it’s a lot of playing and experimenting, and then kind of trusting in my knowledge of how the inks normally would react on paper... it’s a fascinating process,” Lindsay says.

While some of her paintings are



Lindsay Alcock, librarian by day, artist all other hours



deliberate and planned out, others are surprises. “Other times, I’ll just sort of pour some different inks on some paper and see what happens, move it around with various instruments or tip the paper and see what comes out of it. And those ones, of course, end up coming out more abstract – usually they end up being rocks and stones,” Lindsay says.

“I really enjoy those because they’re so organic and how it comes together is so organic. It just represents everything about the process and the ingredients.”

A librarian at the Health Sciences Library at Memorial University by day, Lindsay is reluctant to describe her arts practice as a mere side hustle, since “it’s what gives me the most pleasure in life,” she says. “Art has changed my life and how I choose to live it.” And as she describes a recent commission completed for a customer, it’s clear her work has touched others as well.

“One of her friends, her mother had passed away, and her mother’s favourite flower was clematis. So she asked me if I could paint some clematis for her friend, out of clematis ink. And I actually happened to have some, so I was able to do that. So that meant a lot to her.” (shown below)



Her creative work has also given Lindsay the opportunity to slow down and smell the roses, helping her get more in tune with herself and the world around her.

“I love that it gives me a different connection with the earth. It gives me a different connection with nature and my surroundings and my environment. And I really appreciate that,” she says. ☺

To see more of Lindsay Alcock’s work, you can catch her occasionally at the St. John’s Farmers’ Market, or find her on Instagram and Facebook @oldtroutstudio.

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