



TRANSLATING TREES

What greater source of inspiration could there be than nature? Textile artist Lorraine Roy explains her love of all things natural and how she translates this into her art

Interview by Mary Bennellick



Left: *Winter Field 8*, 2015, 12" x 12"
Above: *Blessings 1*, 2015, 16" x 16"



“MY SCIENCE EDUCATION AND MY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES ARE THE TWO STRONGEST INFLUENCES IN MY ARTMAKING”

Lorraine, welcome to Be Creative! For our readers who don't know much about you, please tell us a little about yourself. I was born and raised in one of the richest agricultural regions in Canada, Southwestern Ontario. My mother taught me to sew at the age of 6. I immediately took to it and loved handling the fabric and playing with her box of remnants. At the same time, I was enthralled by my natural surroundings, and learned a great deal about the wild creatures

and plants that surrounded us. When it came to my formal education, I chose to pursue a BSc in Agriculture, majoring in Ornamental Horticulture. For me, this was a way to include all the subjects that most interested me: nature, science and art. For around 10 years, I worked in the Horticultural field, while at the same time learning more about the textile arts, especially hand embroidery. I was fortunate in joining the Canadian Embroiderers' Guild in London, ON, which

exposed me to many new techniques and international teachers. This was where and how I came to the realization that, yes, I can be a textile artist too! So, thirty years ago, I hung up my secateurs and jumped into art full time.

Have you always wanted to be a textile artist?

I didn't know what a textile artist was until I was well past choosing a profession. No one in my family had ever practised

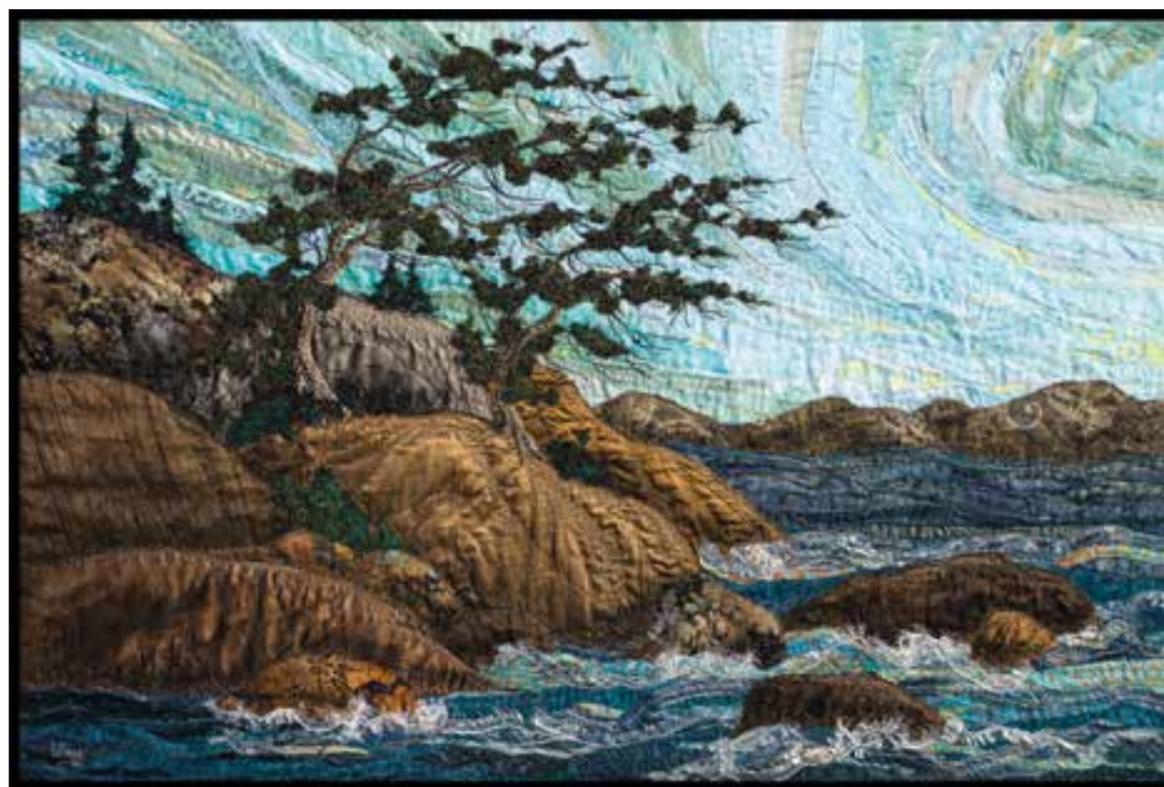
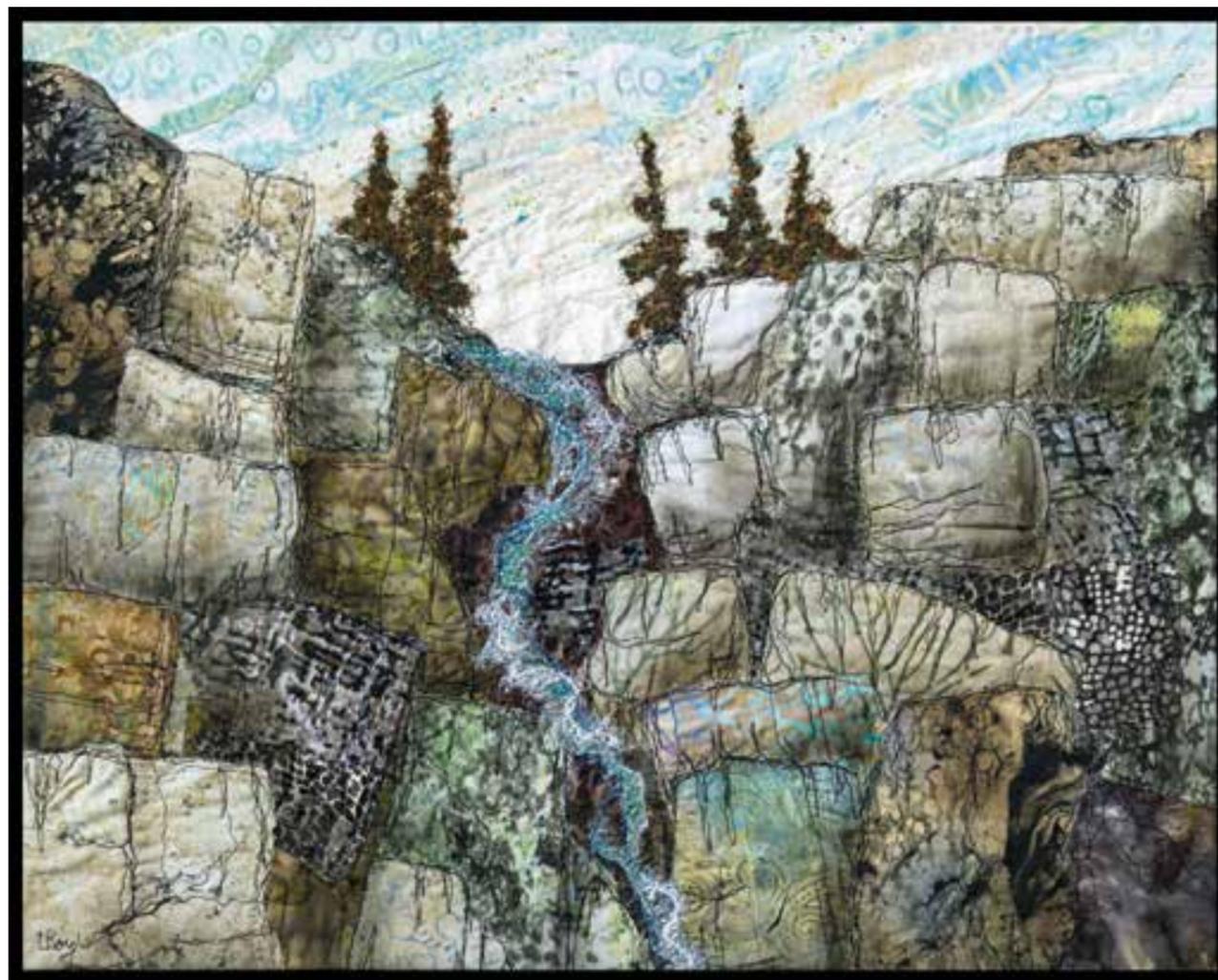
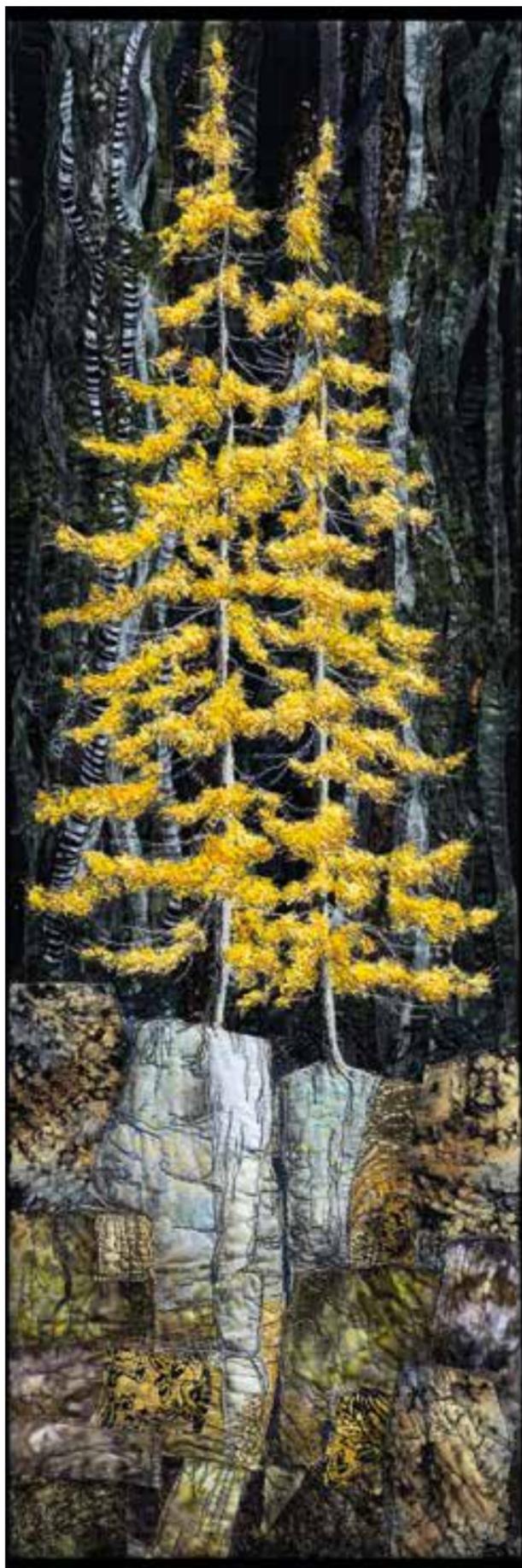
Above: *Garry Oak 1*
2106 18" x 36"

the arts professionally, although I had an aunt who was an amateur painter, and my grandmother designed and made clothing and hats, for herself and her family of 7 children. I guess textile art found me!

How has your background in the sciences and horticulture influenced your practice?

I am so grateful that I learned a profession and trade outside the art education system. Although I have nothing against art education, I believe a young person

needs to learn and absorb many different skills and subjects in order to have something to say in their art. With my background in science, I can draw on a never ending source of inspiration. After my BSc, I continued to learn more about trees, researching all aspects of the subject - historical, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and biological. I believe that my science education and my childhood experiences are the two strongest influences in my artmaking. >>



Do you find that the area where you live influences your work?

Yes, absolutely. After moving to the Niagara Escarpment region just over 10 years ago, I began to design and work with stone and rock imagery. Every day, I see trees and plants clinging to the rock faces and watch as the colours and texture change with the seasons. One of my newer series explores the idea of triumph over adversity, as embodied by these extreme cliff formations and their trees. It is a great source of inspiration on all fronts.

How would you describe your work?

To someone who has never seen my work in person, I would say that my pieces are much like paintings. They are even framed, just like oil paintings. In fact, my technique comes as close to painting with fabric as I can get. It's only when viewers come closer that they realize the entire surface is textile. People ask me why I don't just paint them – I have two reasons. The first is that I have never NOT used fabric, so why retrain myself with an entirely new medium? The second, is that no paint I have ever seen can match the depth of colour and texture I can achieve with my fabrics.

What inspires you and why?

I am mainly inspired by trees and everything about them. Sometimes I think it's because it's so easy to associate myself with them – they convey moods, they come in all shapes and sizes, and people relate to them in so many surprising ways. In my own childhood, I can think of many particular trees that contributed to positive memories of living in the country. They are wonderfully textural and colourful, and lend themselves to endless interpretations, real and imaginary. Over the years, I have made well over 1,000 different pieces inspired by trees and I can easily envision making ten times more without running out of ideas.

Please describe your technique of 'collage with nets' and your processes.

My collage with nets technique is always evolving, but basically it involves laying a fabric ground in the desired size, putting lots of bits of mixed fabrics or fabric strips on top, and covering it all with coloured tulle. The layers are then pinned down together through to the ground piece and intensely machine stitched, free motion style. The result becomes a base for more collage with nets, or applique, or machine embroidery, depending on the needs of the design. Each piece I make requires its own order of working, but nothing I do is complicated. I don't use glue or interfacing, just pins. My two Bernina sewing machines are very old mechanical models with good strong motors. >>



Clockwise from far left:
Woodland Tamaracks 1,
 2016, 36" x 12";
Escarpment Edge 8,
 2016, 16" x 20";
Four Seasons 2,
 2016, 15" x 60";
Come Hither,
 2016, 24" x 48";
On Georgian Bay 1,
 2015, 24" x 36"



Left: *Weirwood 2*, 2015, 12" x 12"
Above: *Willow Spring 1*, 2016, 12" x 12"

Where do you source your materials? Do you have any preferred material you like to work with?

Well, sourcing might be too strong a word - the fabric finds me wherever I go. As a matter of fact, there aren't too many places that don't have fabric, whether I'm looking for it or not. I can use most kinds except wools, knits, heavy corduroy and upholstery fabrics. My current favourites are cotton batiks and silks. I buy them from shops, thrift stores, garage sales and people who sew give me their remnants. It's like Christmas every time.

What kind of person buys your textile art?

My client demographic is quite broad. I've even had young children begin their collections with pieces of mine. What do my collectors have in common? Almost always, they are people who have a strong spiritual and emotional connection with nature and the environment. Young couples and women are the most consistent buyers, and I seem to have a good American following too.

How do you work with a client to fulfil a commission?

Each commission project is different. Some clients are very specific; others are more open to suggestion. My goal is to approach it as a collaboration. I always begin the process with lots of discussion, to narrow down the possibilities. We discuss budget, location, size, shape, colours, and subject matter. Then, I create up to three coloured pencil designs that I digitally position on photos of the client's wall - that way, they can see exactly what the piece will look like in the space. After that, it's matter of adjusting to fit the client's further input. Once the design is approved, I create the work and if the client isn't too far away, I also install it. I've done over 50 commissions and learnt something new with each one.

How would you like your work to be remembered?

I would like my work to be remembered in the same way I remember my own favourite works of art; something special about them draws me in, and I see something new each time I look. They connect me with a better, deeper and richer version of myself. **BT**

