



Painter Tess Moffat ~ interview by Christine Renaud

Born and raised in the Quinte region, Tess Moffat is a self taught painter who loves the outdoors. She spent her childhood summers on the shores of Lake Ontario in Prince Edward County. "It was always sunny it seemed, even if it was raining elsewhere," the upbeat artist remembers.

After obtaining degrees from both the University of Ottawa and Laval University in Quebec City, she moved back home where, she says, she "met her kindred spirit," her husband, Mike.

"I had always wanted a place with room to grow so that I could ride horses on my own land, hike with my dogs and run on quiet roads. Mike and I married and bought a house in the County. We found our own little piece of heaven."

Christine: How did you come to be a painter?

Tess: I have always been driven artistically. It is a passionate thing for me. As a child walking home from school I would stop to stare at clouds, skies, bark on trees and flower petals up close. I was given a Nikon camera at an early age and photographed constantly.

As years past, this passion grew. I would stop a car to gasp at a sunset that just had to be captured. I have thousands and thousands of catalogued photos. One of my husband's earliest memories of us at our new house is waking up to find me gone from the bed, but my side still warm. He sat up and looked out our window to see me tearing out our laneway in one of his long sleeve dress shirts and my rubber boots into the fog, camera in hand. You see, the neighbours had cows that lounged and ate near a pretty creek adjacent to our land. I woke bolt up, saw the fog, and just had to capture it!

After my daughter was born, for the first time ever, I had a kind of down time in the afternoon as she slept. I was hiking with the dogs and my daughter in a snuggly one winter afternoon when I was struck as usual by a certain sunset. I stopped in shock as I realized that I had no camera with me this time. Priorities had changed somehow. All I could do was to memorize this scene. I was driven to do so, but why? I studied the colours I saw and tried to decide how I could reproduce this. I decided that I would rush home and recreate this blissful scene somehow. I raced through the snow and got out some craft paints and dove in when I returned. I haven't looked back since.

My photos now serve as reference. I think the many years photographing have proven to be the backbone for my paintings. Years working with composition and colour have been instrumental.



Christine: Where do you find your inspiration, or creative spark?

Tess: I find inspiration all around me. I love the outdoors and spend the majority of my days outside: running - I run about 70 to 80 km a week - gardening, painting, sports in all seasons, canoeing and camping. I am excited by the wind in the grass, the leaves spiraling downward in a fall wind.

Christine: What do you think is the biggest enemy of creativity and how do you overcome it?

Tess: The biggest enemy of creativity has to be that little voice in your head always asking if it is good enough or if you have made the best use of your time. As life changes, so do the demands on our days. I think 36 hour days might suit me better.

Christine: Who have been your greatest influences?

Tess: From the heart, I have been greatly influenced by my two uncles and my mother. My one uncle was a tremendous gardener and I spent many days deep in his garden learning, digging, observing. My other uncle oil painted and collected art. He took me to many art exhibitions and auctions. My mother also likes to paint. She also encouraged my extreme love of nature and the outdoors.

Christine: Whose work do you admire?

Tess: I admire work that has a real outdoor feel. I admire the works of Tom Thompson for its ruggedness and truth. I admire it even more though because he lived the life he painted. I have deliberately canoed into places where he stayed in Algonquin to see what he saw and feel the land there. He was a great "outback camper."

I admire Suzor Coté, a famous Quebec painter who also delved from the nature around him for inspiration. I have many favourite painters: Monet and other impressionists, Robert Bateman and his son, Joseph Orr, William Hook...

Christine: What are you most proud of?

Tess: I am most proud of my large pieces, I think. People often say that they feel as though they could walk right in them and that they can feel the wind or snow around them and the clouds above.

Christine: What do you wish you would have known when you first started as an artist?

Tess: That it is a journey not a destination to become an artist. One teacher or two could not teach me to be a painter. I teach myself. I grow with each brushstroke. The journey fills my days with excitement and anticipation of the results to come. Life is good!

Christine: What advice would you give an aspiring artist?

Tess: Be patient with yourself. Enjoy your journey. Find a proper space to create.

Christine: What is influencing your work currently?

Tess: Skies are always influencing me. I never tire of them. Colours and light intrigue me.

Christine: What would you like to do in the future?

Tess: Exactly what I am doing presently: paint, paint and paint some more! I feel blessed to do something that I am passionate about.

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