



# Karen Richardson's watercolour toolbox

“Watercolour is known as a difficult media, but I don’t find it so. Actually, what I enjoy about it is that you cannot totally control it.”

Watercolour on Paper:  
Among the Fallen, 10 x 8”

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **Linda Lee Purvis**

Perhaps it was her upbringing in the bucolic Ottawa Valley, east of Algonquin Park, that nourished her innate bond with the outdoors, or maybe it was the ambitious and illustrious travels cross-country by RV, motorcycle, or snowmobile that charmed her creative heart, but somewhere along the way, Port Perry watercolour artist, Karen Richardson became

inspired to capture and articulate, through the serendipitous temperament of paint, the idle moments of nature in candid reality.

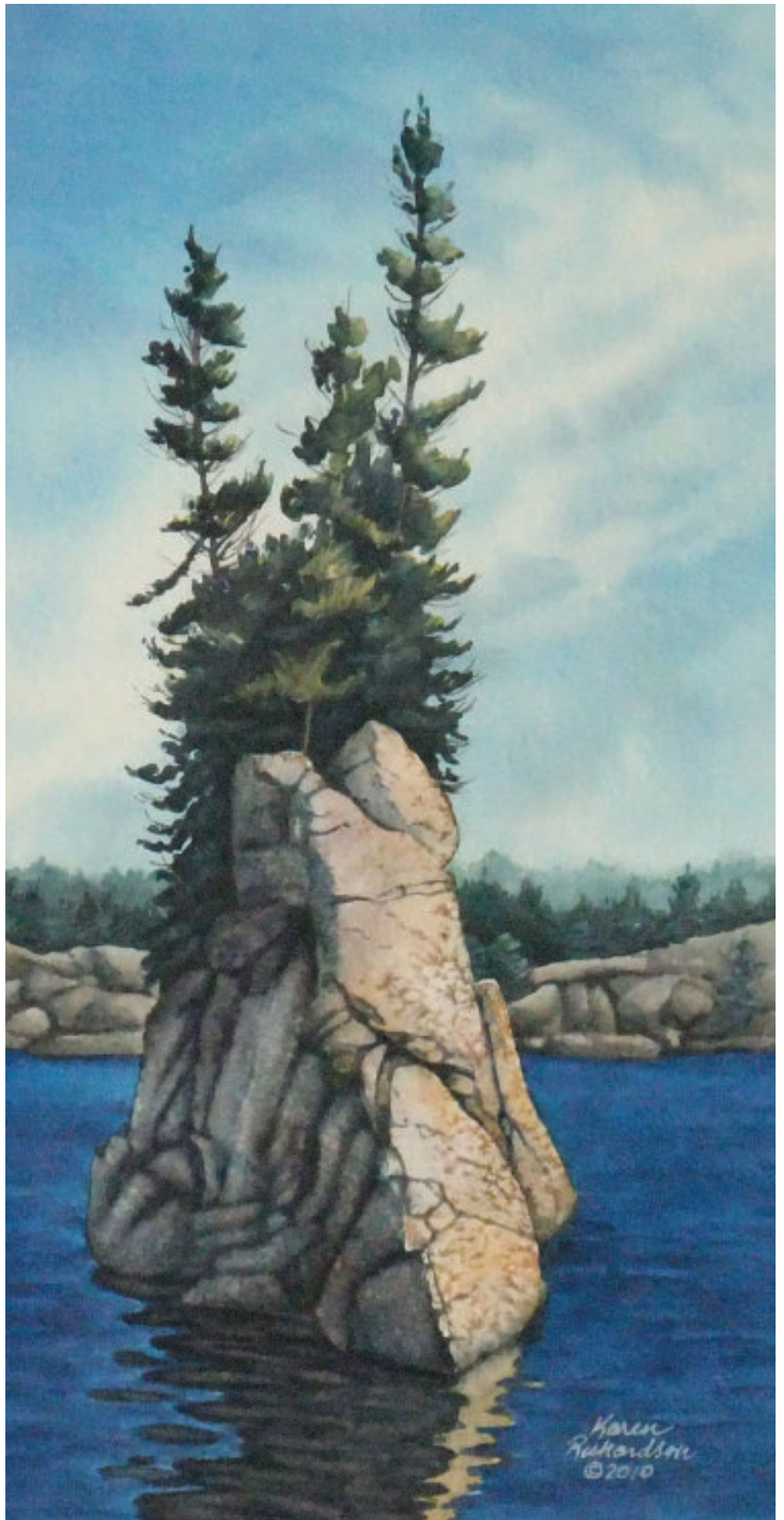
Karen’s artistic intrigue was cultivated from a young age, and with the benefit of both a sophisticated high school arts program, along with various art classes as an adult learner, she eventually mastered her personal style through a hybrid blending of learned

techniques and self-directed experimentation. In turn, she has earned a reputation for her own signature mien, where her work can arch a bridge between the banks of colour from soft and luminous, to dark and sultry. With over 600 paintings in collections spanning 19 countries, and participation in over 100 solo and group shows, Karen's resulting regional, national and international awards are equally impressive.

Her images speak frankly of natural settings, often with a focus on simple subjects such as a random clutch of pebbles, perfectly depicted in unstirred placement. Her colour palette can speak softly with the translucent light of mid-day, or resonate with the opaque baritone hues of deep shade – so much so that this end of the spectrum is often mistaken for acrylic paint. Although Karen does dabble in acrylics from time to time, watercolour »

Watercolour on Paper:  
Shipwreck Island, 11 x 6"

Acrylic on Canvas:  
Margarita on the Rocks, 24 x 12"





Watercolour on Paper:  
World At My Feet, 10 x 14"

has always been her preference. "Watercolour is known as a difficult media, but I don't find it so. Actually, what I enjoy about it is that you cannot totally control it; that's what keeps it interesting."

With over 100 commissions to date, Karen is sought to illustrate homes, cottages, and other notable architecture, such as the campus buildings at UOIT. She likes to take her own reference photos, when possible, so as to relate the subject to its surroundings. Clients have the opportunity to denote specific characteristics they would like to have included in the image, perhaps particular elements relevant to seasonal activities, like a hammock or canoe at the cottage that may not always be present, but are associated with time spent there. Karen has even had the task of recreating a cabin that no longer exists, exclusively from floor plans and detailed verbal input from the client. In that case, she

visited the site where the cabin once stood to gain a sense of the landscape in which to frame the structure. Needless to say, the commission process can be very personal, and as such, Karen plans to enhance this experience by assembling a corresponding coffee table book that documents the entire process as a keepsake reference for her clients. Commissions usually take three months or so, with consideration given to a seasonal preference for the painting, if relevant, for scheduling the reference photos.

Karen adds to her ever-growing collection of inspired photos that she amasses throughout her travels. She and her husband, John, are driven by their adventurous spirits that steer them to mountains and prairies, tundra and desert, dirt roads and snow trails. A pocket camera is a must for compact convenience, with frequent shots snapping up inspiration en route, and visually documenting excursions



Watercolour on Paper:  
Island Retreat, 5 x 15"



Watercolour on Paper:  
Beach Treasures, 20 x 16"

as they unfurl. Their travels have taken them from coast to coast, with Alaska, Yukon and the Northwest Territories, Newfoundland, Gaspé, Cuba, and the American Midwest having been targets for exploration.

As another adjunct to her own painting, Karen teaches other aspiring artists how to work with watercolours. She holds classes for small groups at her home studio, as well as at various other locations from time to time, and offers a number of classes to choose from. "I find that there are a lot of baby boomers that are interested in exploring their creative pursuits. They may not have room for collecting art necessarily, but many do have an interest to learn how to make art." In order to deliver the (seemingly) vast girth of watercolour techniques palatable, Karen explains, "I break it up into manageable bits so students gain confidence [with each success] and then they're ready for the next bit." During one of her workshops, as Karen was explaining the same techniques for a class once again, a student chimed up, "You should write a book". The words tripped through her head and twiggled; she thought, "I really should write a book!" And so recently, she did.

With the intention of addressing all of the common pitfalls of watercolour, both before they happen and after, Karen wrote *Watercolour Toolbox*, to be released this spring. "I wanted to reach and help more people with their painting, and this is written in a way to address the issues that painters often have, or will struggle with." The large format, full colour book is sectioned into 18 key challenges and how to conquer, or avoid them. In addition, there are eight how-to demonstrations that illustrate specific techniques to visually affirm the process. *Watercolour Toolbox* is geared to both novice and amateur watercolourists, with specific care taken to deliver a succinct reference of useful information, without a lot of fluff. Karen will announce launch dates on her website, where it will also be available for purchase.

In addition to several shows that she exhibits in annually, Karen is a participant on the Lake Scugog & Port Perry Studio Tour each spring; this year falling on May 4 and 5. She will also be returning for the 22nd year to the Buckhorn Fine Art Festival, north of Peterborough; an event that is rated in the top 100 events by Festivals and Events Ontario. The fine art and sculpture is revealed at a Preview Night Garden Party on the Friday evening, and then on display over the weekend: August 16 to 18.

For a comprehensive look at Karen's work, travels, shows, book launch, and schedule of up-coming workshops, visit her website: [www.karenrichardson.ca](http://www.karenrichardson.ca). 📖