

Copper feather project takes flight for Canada's 150th

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With 91 finished, copper artist Barbara Barkley has 59 to go.

For Canada's sesquicentennial, Barkley was looking for a creative challenge.

She spends hours embossing sheets of copper, manipulating them into detailed pieces of work, bending the copper to show rounded edges, the stippled dots, the delicate barbs of a feather.

This year, in honour of Canada's milestone, she decided to create 150 feathers.

"I wanted to be respectful of our indigenous heritage and I thought this was kind of an interesting approach because I can put a lot of elements in it that are meaningful to people," she said.

Each one tells a story.

Inside the pattern of the feather's lines, there are symbols and pictures, each one telling part of that story.

A feather for Nova Scotia features the waves of the ocean, the Peggy's Cove lighthouse and hidden between the lines is the subtle tail of a whale.

"It has been a great little journey. It started out as something really simple and has just evolved. It's been fantastic," Barkley said in her west Centretown studio, on Spruce Street.

Barkley's feather, if she made one, would include a lot of natural elements, she said.

There would be a beaver, a loon, a gardening trowel, a stand-up paddleboard, the shape of one of the tools she uses in her art – and a poppy for her dad who served in the Second World War.

Originally Barkley was planning to create 150 large legacy feathers, using different symbols and pictures to tell her clients' stories over the backdrop of the feather.

But her plans changed. The feathers now vary in size between something that fits on your key ring to larger framed pieces. Each can take anywhere from three to 40 hours to complete. They cost between \$35 and upwards of \$400 depending on their size and level of detail.

"It turned into something that was affordable for people



Barkley uses various tools to make impressions on thin sheets of copper to make the detailed pieces. She has completed about 91 feathers so far.

and it still accomplished what I wanted to do in a smaller way. It's been a great combination of different sizes, different approaches," she said.

Not only has the size of the feathers changed, but the shape has as well.

During the project, a friend gave her an eagle feather and it changed the way she shapes the pieces.

"Every time someone shows you something, or tells you something, it's ever evolving and I love that. I guess that's what art is. It evolves as you try new things."

Barkley has been working with copper for 15 years, under

the name Copper Tree Creative Studio.

"It's always challenging, I don't know how to explain it. I just love to manipulate it. I love the feel of it," she said.

Her favourite pieces involve more elements, more detail.

The feathers are created by tracing a pattern on to the copper, pressing in the lines with a pen-like tool on both sides of the copper sheet.

"You start to tool it, flip it over and go the other way. You continue to do that. You are constantly trying to keep it down and keep it flat. It's a lot of trial and error."

With dozens of feathers left,



Photos by Melissa Murray/Metroland

Copper artist Barbara Barkley decided to challenge herself to create 150 embossed copper feathers to celebrate Canada's sesquicentennial.

Barkley is enjoying every second of her project.

"It's really kind of endless. I don't know if I'll ever be bored of it. Every one is challenging. Every one is so different."

As people purchase the feathers as gifts, they are making their way across the country, Barkley said.

As the number of feathers remaining winds down,

she's hoping to create more legacy feathers.

"They are the most meaningful, I think and the most interesting to do. You are capturing somebody's life or something that will last forever. To think that someone will have that in their family for generations, that's incredibly rewarding to any artist. This is really what inspires me."



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