

LORRAINE ROY MERGING SCIENCE + ART

BY BARBARA DELANEY

The Niagara Escarpment near the western edge of Lake Ontario is home to Canadian textile artist Lorraine Roy. It's where she lives, and it's also where she finds her inspiration. In addition to the famous cliff over which the Niagara River plummets at Niagara Falls, this area features a wide variety of farms, recreation areas, animals, and much more. Of paramount interest to Roy are the forests of the escarpment—the foundation of her study and her art.

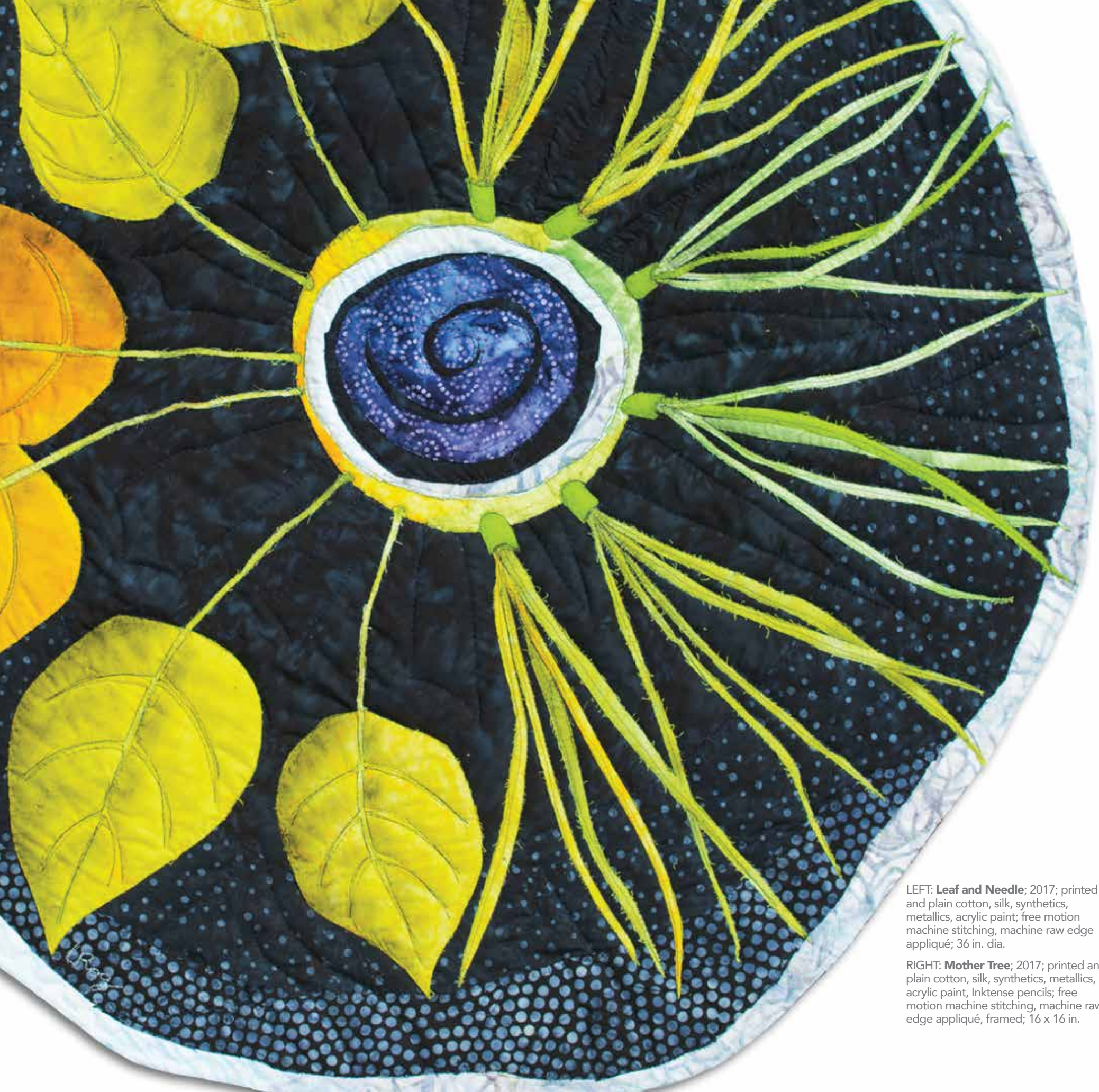
Roy has a BS in horticulture, but she said she is an artist, not a scientist. Rather, her science background fuels her appetite to learn more about her surroundings, specifically the trees that populate the area where she lives, which are some of the oldest trees in Canada. She said trees are “giant recording devices, with a lot of embedded information,” information she tries to relate to our human experience. She is keenly interested in every aspect of trees and believes we have a lot to learn from them. “Once you start looking at trees, there's an endless chain of possibilities,” she said.

Though she has always been interested in art, she chose science as her major in college. During those years, she also took a variety of workshops and made time to visit museums and galleries to cultivate and feed her appetite for art. However, it took 10 years after finishing college for her to get back to making art, and she draws from her background in science for ongoing inspiration. She has a self-standing, dedicated studio space and gallery on her property in Ontario, surrounded by gardens. She said she can't wait to go out there each day and get to work.

Lorraine Roy is one of the first artists who came to mind when I was writing Create Naturally: Go Outside and Discover Nature with 15 Artists. She artfully combines her background in horticulture with her unique creative vision. — Marcia Young

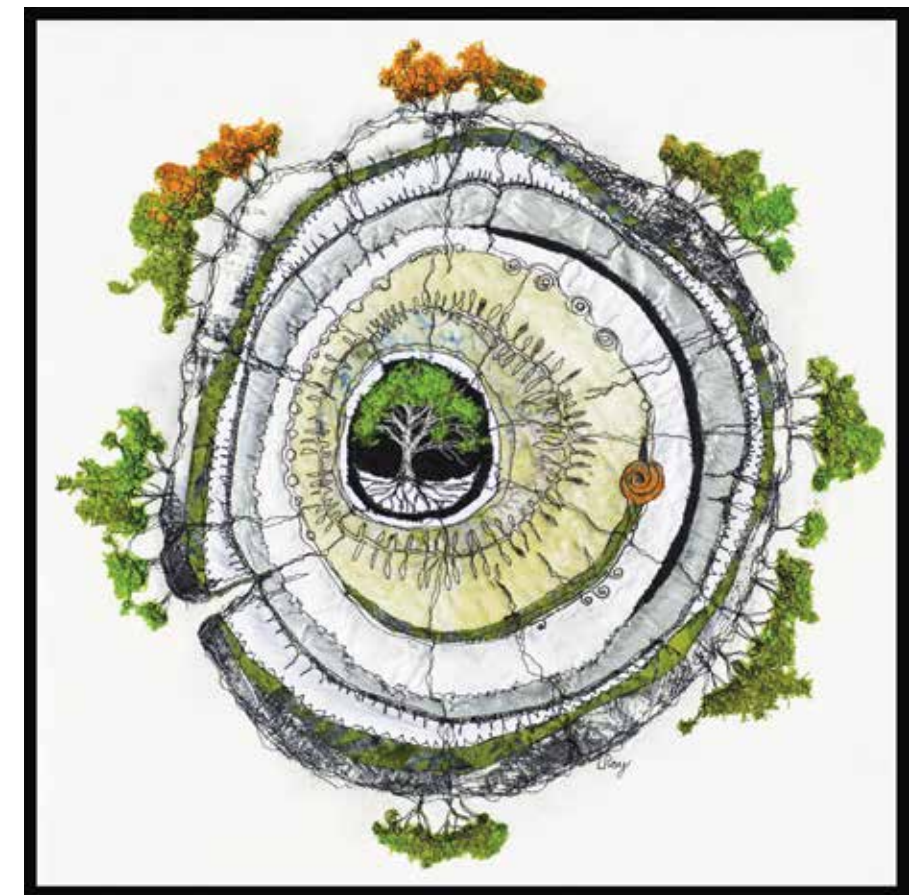
LEFT: **This Avian Heart #2 (Blue Jay);** 2019; printed and plain cotton, silk, synthetics, metallics, acrylic paint; free motion machine stitching, machine raw edge appliqué; 35 in. dia.





LEFT: **Leaf and Needle**; 2017; printed and plain cotton, silk, synthetics, metallics, acrylic paint; free motion machine stitching, machine raw edge appliqué; 36 in. dia.

RIGHT: **Mother Tree**; 2017; printed and plain cotton, silk, synthetics, metallics, acrylic paint, Inktense pencils; free motion machine stitching, machine raw edge appliqué, framed; 16 x 16 in.



The details in Roy's artwork are not happenstance. Rather, they are the result of her seeking out scientists and getting a "distilled version of science" from them. Dr. Suzanne Simard, from the University of British Columbia, studies the effects of climate on trees and has been a huge influence on Roy's work. Roy said she enjoys passing on to others what she learns from these encounters, making what she has learned "more accessible" to those she shares her art with. She sees a real connection between humans and nature—a spiritual connection rather than a physical one.

Her discoveries—the knowledge she gathers before she begins a piece of art—help drive the work and add to its creation. Sometimes, what she does in a piece is in line with science; other times, she makes an aesthetic decision. Roy believes our aesthetic comes from something deep within us, and when she makes decisions based on hers, it results in the most accurate depiction of what she is trying to show in her art. Thus, her work often mixes abstract with realism.

Roy said she does not go looking for ideas for her work—they come to her. "Sometimes, it can take a month to actually get going, but once I get going, I can't stop," she said. She most often works in series, but not always. Sometimes, a new project or suite will "leap off of a series, like the branches of a tree" and become a single work.

The *Salmon Forest*, part of Roy's *Woven Wood* exhibition, tells the story of how a nitrogen isotope found in migrating salmon ends up in the rings of trees. When salmon are either captured by wildlife or die after laying their eggs, their corpses are dragged into the woods, where the remains decompose, becoming an important source of nitrogen for the trees, which then ends up in their rings. It's yet another example of nature's "interconnected systems." Roy is entranced by the information that can be learned from tree rings.

The abstract nature of Roy's work is often what draws people in. She wants people to look at her art and enjoy it, but she said she considers looking as the "entry point." Her hope is that, once viewers are drawn to a piece, they will then ask questions about it. She loves talking about her work. It's very important to her to communicate to others what her art is about, to help viewers interpret and understand it. She can often be found at her exhibitions doing just that, and her pieces are often displayed with story labels.



LEFT: **Winter**; 2015; printed and plain cotton, silk, synthetics, metallics, acrylic paint; free motion machine stitching, machine raw edge appliqué; 46 in. dia.

RIGHT: **One Hundred Years**; 2018; printed and plain cotton, silk, synthetics, metallics, acrylic paint, Inktense pencils; free motion machine stitching, machine raw edge appliqué; 21 x 20 in.



Some of her work is further inspired by literature and tied to a poem or quote. *Call of the Heart*, a suite of three 36-inch wall hangings, is one example. This suite continues her work with the significance of tree rings. “Tree rings record time and events in the life of a tree by building layer upon layer of fresh cells, leaving the marks of its life forever preserved within,” she said. “Similarly, we move through our lives collecting and sometimes burying our own memories.” This suite is tied to a poem by spiritual leader Mooji that speaks to being true to yourself.

Raw-edge appliqué is Roy’s main technique. She enhances her pieces with free-motion stitching and often adds color and interest with acrylic paint or Inktense pencils. Early on, she stitched by hand, but soon moved on to using a machine so she could save time, as well as work on larger pieces.

Roy is not a perfectionist. She said this allows her to stop when she feels like stopping. Anything she may perceive as imperfection drives her to improve it in the next piece she creates, but it does not prevent her from continuing with the work at hand. She believes, by embracing imperfection, she’s more in tune with nature. “Imperfection helps us grow because it makes us learn,” she said.

For *One Hundred Years*, Roy said she wanted to know what it would be like to recreate the tree rings of a 100-year-old tree using thread. She said it was “a long and dizzying experience,” sewing that many rings. Along with dark rings, she added accents of colored thread to signify the drought, fire, and rain, “the history tree rings record as the tree grows.”

In her years of tree studies, Roy said she has acquired a vast number of reasons to love trees, one of which is the fact that mature trees protect and nurture young saplings. She goes into detail about this in Marcia Young’s book *Create Naturally*. “In recent scientific research, it has been found that young seedlings in a forest setting are nurtured by their larger and more mature counterparts, with the help of microscopic fungi.” In her piece *Mother Tree*, Roy captures and celebrates this relationship.

Roy said she can never say everything she wants to say in just one piece of art. Each piece she creates adds to the story she is telling; each piece she makes is “the next step to her next piece.” She has created more than 2,000 artworks to date and sees no end to this inspiring work.

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