



Contributed / Anne Kaese
Anne Kaese creates calligraphy for The Windsor Memorial Fund animal rescue during a 2022 fundraising event. Kaese, a master calligrapher and local watercolor artist, frequently receives requests from clients for bookmarks.

Lessons in calligraphy: Anne Kaese's writing on the wall

BY LONNA WHITING - The Arts Partnership

FARGO – Visual artist, calligrapher and teacher Anne Kaese believes there's an artist in everyone, no matter their skill, talent or experience.

"Being an artist is what we all are. Some of us use paint, a pen, a piping bag. Some of us cut a sandwich into four triangles or into four squares, and that is art. You've just got to find those moments to make a decision to do something creative," Kaese said.

In 2023, Kaese was awarded \$1,000 in Individual Arts Partnership grant funding from The Arts Partnership to study traditional scripts, calligraphy and related art with a renowned teacher for a year of intense monthly workshops.

Learning and teaching are at the heart of her craft, and since receiving the funding, Kaese has kept herself busy, teaching classes via Zoom, connecting with longtime students, speaking at events about art, creativity and the St. John's Bible. She also sells her work at Gallery 4 and the Rourke Art Museum.

"I love teaching: being able to help people see a path, a way they can find their creative muse so that they can find an interest – maybe a passion – something that gives them the tools and the ability to see a path that gives them peace," Kaese said.

While she's added teaching, mentoring and not an insignificant amount of art history to her curriculum vitae over the years, Kaese said it always comes back to calligraphy and spreading the word that the creation and enjoyment of art is for everyone.

"Calligraphers tend to be nice, kind, mild-mannered people, even if they do walk around with sharp pointy things," she said. "And I always say to my students that one of the greatest compliments is if you create something that you never created before. That means as a teacher that I've ignited a piece of your imagination that you didn't even know you had."

'Ink on my fingers' talk Nov. 9

Kaese will open herself up to questions during a FMVA-sponsored artist talk on Nov. 9 at Plains Art Museum from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The talk, titled "Ink on my fingers, bees in my hair – the journeys of a calligrapher," will draw from Kaese's decades of experience as a calligrapher.

The event is free and open to the public.



Tools of the trade

Raised in South Africa, Kaese first put quill to paper when she was about age 12. She dabbled in inks for the next 35 years, picking up watercolor along the way, and blending the two mediums – words and images – into what she refers to as her tools of storytelling.

“It’s always been a constant in my life to use words and color as a way to tell a story, whether it’s my own story or the story of other people and experiences – life,” Kaese said.

When she was first starting out, she found a lot of peace in the practice.

“So it is a relaxation. A concentration. A meditation for me,” Kaese said.

As a younger adult, she moved away from home to a larger city where there were entire communities of calligraphers that opened her up to the great, wide world of method and tradition.

By the time she moved to the Red River Valley with her husband in the early 2000s, Kaese had found a place where she could cultivate a community of her own. “There aren’t many of us running around Fargo. I sort of had a unique opportunity to cultivate something new and different in the community. Something that I could teach, something that I could mentor people and connect with people, and create a little community,” she said.

Embracing historical context

The history aspect of Kaese’s calligraphy practice took off around 2013, when she had more time to devote to studying it.

“I had the luxury of time to really start leaning into that and studying the history of manuscripts, the history of calligraphy, the history of text,” Kaese said.

Visits to see the Book of Kells and the Bodleian libraries in Oxford, England, left her in awe of a craft she’d been doing her entire life.

“It’s one of the connections we have that’s physical and tangible and is almost exactly like it was 400 or 1,500 years ago. The feel of a quill in your hand hasn’t changed much over the millennia,” Kaese said. “Making ink is pretty much the same. Taking velum and making a surface that you can write and paint on, those techniques really haven’t changed much.”

Studying and researching books and eras helped Kaese discover a richness of technique.

She also became involved in the St. John’s Bible project at St. John’s University in Minnesota where she lent her skills and historical knowledge to the book.

“There, I could really indulge my interests and curiosities with the creation of a modern manuscript using traditional tools and techniques. You could actually see it come to life. You talk about a manuscript and people’s eyes roll into the back of their heads, but being able to spend time with people who had those skills has become quite the thing for me,” Kaese said.

Those interests and curiosities aren’t solely focused on history. She often teaches about art deco and once did an entire series devoted to Dr. Who, from the British sci-fi television series.

Today, her energy for the subject is as endless as ever. “By the end of this year, I will have done 24 workshops. That’s almost 90 hours of teaching in watercolor, calligraphy, Medieval arts, book binding and book making, on top of 14 class series of 4 weeks of lessons” she said. “I tap into these opportunities to share this knowledge and aggressively pass it on.”

She’s walking students through a course about art deco right now and has plans to book more classes in the future.



www.AnneKaese.com

"We start with facts as we understand them. Then we have artifacts that we look at and study, and then we can move off of that and build off that and start creating our own interpretations, and then your imagination really kicks in because you've built confidence because you've got a good model," she said.

People interested in learning about calligraphy or book-making can visit Kaese's website for more information on her class offerings.

Kaese started implementing watercolor into her calligraphy practice several years ago.

Computing by day, calligraphy by night

Believe it or not, Kaese has a day job as a solution architect at Hitachi Solutions where she designs solutions for computer software systems. And guess what? Kaese calls it creative.

"It is creative because I'm pulling together different threads and creating a solution. That's extremely creative. And we're finding a path that makes sense for everybody, but it's still relatively rectilinear," she said.

Kaese spends a majority of her work day talking with other people and delights in the quiet evenings she can spend alone with quill and paper.

"I take great delight in spending time with my art, which can be very solitary, and I like that because I do spend most of my day talking to people," she said. "I can go to the back of my brain and run free."



Contact Anne for more information on her classes or professional calligraphic and artistic services. Or stop in at Gallery 4 or the Rourke Art Museum to buy some of her small art pieces.

For more information, visit www.AnneKaese.com

This article is part of a content partnership with The Arts Partnership, a nonprofit organization cultivating the arts in Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo. For more information, visit [http:// theartspartnership.net](http://theartspartnership.net).