

P. Buckley Moss' work is 'art from the heart'

BY RALPH BERRIER JR.



BUCHANAN -- Not even the death of a beloved older sister could tear P. Buckley Moss away from her adoring fans.

Early during her appearance at the Apple Barn Gallery in Buchanan on Sunday, the popular and prolific Virginia artist learned by telephone that her sister, Mary Elizabeth, had died in Texas after several years of having Alzheimer's disease.

People were lined up by the dozens to meet Moss and have them sign copies of her prints, so she stayed to sign them all for more than four hours.

"She would have expected me to," Moss said later. "She would have said, 'Pat, don't be ridiculous.' It was actually a blessing for her to die. I love my sister and her husband. They're good, good people."

She never let on as she posed for pictures, cracked jokes and signed hundreds of framed prints. That's devotion. Moss and her fans have it for one another.

"You are so beautiful," one of her fans gushed.

"You've got the Irish tongue," Moss retorted.

People are wild about Moss, the Waynesboro artist whom friends know by her first name, Pat. For more than 40 years, Moss has been famous for her colorful renderings of rural Virginia life, especially the Mennonite communities she met in the Shenandoah Valley.

Virginia infuses her work, from paintings of familiar scenes on the commonwealth's college campuses to landmarks familiar to locals.

Tonia Ostendorf of Salem became a fan after receiving such a painting last year from her parents -- a picture of the loved, lamented and long-gone Lakeside amusement park.

"Lakeside was my first job," said Ostendorf, who used to operate the Tilt-A-Whirl at the Salem landmark. She framed the picture along with a pair of original Lakeside tickets. She traveled to Buchanan to have Moss sign the frame.

"Each picture has a personal meaning to people," Ostendorf said. "One picture can draw you in."

That sentiment was echoed by Shelley Clary of Bedford and her sister, Shannon Green, of Princeton, W.Va., who came to the signing with their families. Both have more than a dozen Moss prints, including paintings of the Peaks of Otter and of Bluefield College, where Green studied.

Moss' paintings "are part of where we're from," Green said. "They're a part of our history."

Irene Carter of Boones Mill is such a Moss fan, she has re-created several of Moss' most popular paintings in cross-stitch form. She and her daughter, Vanessa Carter of Smith Mountain Lake, brought some of her needlework for Moss to sign.

"This is what I do at night when my husband watches sports," Irene Carter said.

Moss, a 79-year-old New York City native, studied art at The Cooper Union in Manhattan before moving with her first husband and family to Virginia in 1964.

The Virginia surroundings inspired her best-known work, which feature slender figures often in outdoor or family settings. She also does modernist work, which is on display four times a year at her open house in Waynesboro, but it's the Virginia paintings that attract people to her shows.

"Regular, everyday folks" enjoy Moss' work, said Apple Barn owner Rachel Nichols, who also owns a gift shop and fruit orchard in Troutville. She has been carrying Moss' work since the mid-1990s and she sells Moss prints and originals.

The Apple Barn unveiled a new piece from Moss, a painting of snow-covered Sharp Top Mountain, one of the Peaks of Otter.

"When you look at her pictures, you get a nice, peaceful feeling," Nichols said. "Her paintings are from the heart."