

You either get it, or you don't

COUNTY ARTIST ROBERT DANIELIS IS THE ONLY CANADIAN EVER TO HAVE SHOWN AT THE AMERICAN FOLK ART GALLERY IN NEW YORK CITY.

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THE COUNTY

They make you do a double take. They are eccentric figures of cows, chickens, pigs and people, gaily painted and in improbable poses and always with a tongue-in-cheek title that will leave you bemused.

They are the creations of local artist Robert Danielis, whose works have shown in major galleries and adorn private homes in such far-flung places as Australia, England, Los Angeles and Chicago. They have been featured at the prestigious McMichael Gallery and he is the only Canadian ever to have shown at the American Folk Art Gallery in New York City.

They carry titles like "Waiting for Ed McMahon", "Chicken of the Sea" and "Moo River" and are often the folk art equivalent of a Far Side cartoon.

"You either get it or you don't," he says of his works. "It's hard to say where the inspiration comes from. I don't spend a lot of energy coming up with the stuff. It just comes."

It all began for Danielis when he was building reproduction antique furniture and developing the "Homestead House" line of paints. One day he was asked to make a horse, and discovered that he had a knack for crafting wooden folk art objects.

"I'm a self-made artist," he says with a grin. "I don't have any technical training, but if we were all trained the same way, we'd all pro-

duce the same kind of stuff, wouldn't we?"

He took the first horse to a gallery where it sold right away, showed at various galleries in Toronto and finally decided to sell the paint company and produce his art on a full-time basis. In the process, he moved to the County and bought property at Pt. Petre.

"I do some papier mache pieces," he says, "but most of them are pine and cedar painted with acrylic. They are one of a kind. Sometimes I rework pieces with the same title, but no two of them are ever the same."

There is sometimes a discrepancy, he says, between inspiration and execution.

"Sometimes I'll have what I think is a great idea, and then it just doesn't work when I finish them. Sometimes I'll start a piece with a particular title in mind, but when the work is done, it's obvious that it's something else."

An example of this is "Swine Flu", which started life as "If Pigs Could Fly", a herd of Rockette-like porkers in the sky.

Sometimes Danielis' work can cause consternation rather than admiration in the onlooker.

"I did one piece which depicted a Jesus-figure carrying a cocktail tray. The title was "Cheeses of

Nazareth" and I have had people tell me they were offended by it. On the other hand, I had nuns who thought it was hilarious. There's no accounting for how anything will strike an individual."

And when inspiration doesn't strike him, he returns to the folk-art horses and sheep he began with.

His personal favourites, though, are the huge Noah's Arks that contain 44 figures and are 60 inches high and 60 inches long – they take him six months to do.

For several years, Danielis ran the "Folkworks" Gallery in the Bristol Building behind Books on the Bay,

but these days he is working out of his home. His works haven't travelled far though; they have found a showplace in the bookstore, where his buzzards and cows are tucked amidst stacks of books. One of his reasons for giving up the studio was the influx of other artists into the area.

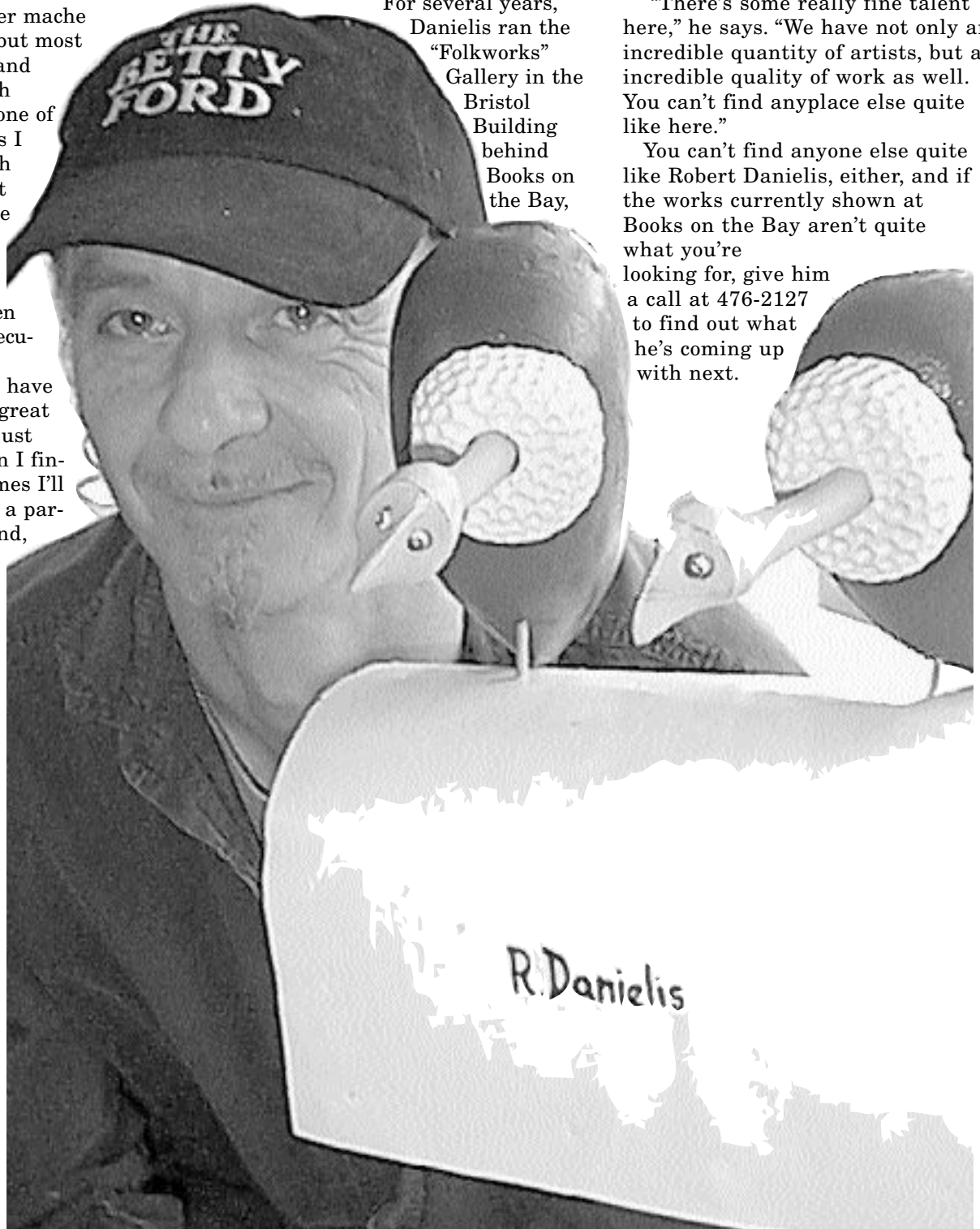
"I realized that I don't need to run my own studio," he says. "There are lots of places to show the work."

He also notes that the Prince Edward arts community is unique.

"There's some really fine talent here," he says. "We have not only an incredible quantity of artists, but an incredible quality of work as well. You can't find anyplace else quite like here."

You can't find anyone else quite like Robert Danielis, either, and if the works currently shown at Books on the Bay aren't quite what you're looking for, give him a call at 476-2127 to find out what he's coming up with next.

'Swine Flu' – a herd of Rockette-like porkers in the sky – started life as 'If Pigs Could Fly'



Danielis with mailbox titled 'Waiting for Ed McMahon'

Sue Capon photo