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Terry Blakemore poses for a portrait on Tuesday in her Coeur d'Alene studio. Blakemore was named this year's Coeur d'Alene Art Association Artist of the Year.

The woman of a million faces

Blakemore receives 2016 Artist of the Year award

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COEUR d'ALENE

— The faces in Terry Blakemore's hand-painted oil portraits look as though they're about to come to life and start telling their stories.

"This girl, her grandparents have a studio and (painting) is a hobby for them. I just love that one," Blakemore said Tuesday, gesturing to one of her creations.

"This one I kind of branched out," she said, pointing to another. "It's not finished but this girl loves dragons, so I decided to put some dragons in. She loves books, she loves dragons, so that's what that one's about."

Blakemore's passion for real people, painting and the arts is evident with every shade and every stroke in her work. Her art peers have also noticed her passion and talent by honoring her as the Coeur d'Alene Art Association's 2016 Artist of the Year.

"She's unique in the group in that she does

portraits," said Yvonne Benzinger, public relations representative for the association. "I'm very partial to an Indian painting that she did of a young woman in Native American costume. The girl was wearing her grandmother's dress that she was married in."

Blakemore conducts her painting in a little Coeur d'Alene house that she has turned into an art studio. The walls serve as the gallery for dozens of paintings and the entire space is dedicated to art. She uses live people as models but also paints nature and flowers, city scenes and whatever compels her to place the paintbrush on the canvas.

She's been a member of the Coeur d'Alene Art Association for about four years and said she did not see this honor coming. It was announced at the association's Christmas party, where she was given a plaque to acknowledge her accomplishment.

"I was so surprised," she said. "I just didn't

keep track. I won a lot of second places but you never know what people are going to like."

Each month, association members are encouraged to bring their creations to meetings. They receive a point for bringing one and more points if voted first, second or third place. First-place winners get to hang their winning pieces in Frame of Mind Framing and Art Gallery.

Blakemore humbly said she feels it was a very close competition, but the honor is a validation for her.

"It's a whole year of everybody bringing their stuff in and everybody voting on what they like," she said. "It kind of says that, 'Overall, you did something well, you completed your work and you brought it in and you participated.'"

Blakemore has an extensive background and education in the arts, including a music degree from California State University Hayward, a master of fine arts in theater arts

from San Francisco State University and a completion of a five-year method acting program from the Jean Sheldon Acting School.

She dabbles in photography, poetry, creative writing and a whole world of media, color and textures. She has worked as a teacher of art and design and an interior designer and as a retiree continues to give art lessons to a handful of students. She also belongs to multiple art societies and organizations.

Blakemore said she knows she would have many more art-related hobbies if only time allowed.

"The world is like a big banquet," she said with a sweet smile. "You want to eat from all the plates, but you just can't."

"I was given my first paint set and first dance class when I was 5 years old. I have been involved in art of some sort ever since. I paint because I must, probably because I'm not writing or acting or dancing and ... I have to be creating."