

# Dianne Rodwell

## *Oil, Watercolor, Encaustic and Other Mixed Mediums*



**T**HE TRIANGLE IS FULL of many gifted and talented artists. We had the opportunity to recently speak with Dianne Rodwell whose open, working studio is located at Artspace in downtown Raleigh. She and Miriam Sagasti, also featured in this issue, came from different backgrounds and use different styles. Enjoy both women's stories in this issue of *Women's Edge*.

**W.E.:** *How did you become interested in art?*

**Dianne:** I can't remember a time when I was not interested in art. The need to create has just been with me my entire life, like an obsession. One of my earliest, favorite memories is the smell of that first school box of half round wax crayons, those flat-backed, fat coloring delights. Whenever I am around a box of crayons now, have to open it and smell the inspiration! What a simple pleasure.

**W.E.:** *Who was influential in your decision to pursue art as a career?*

**Dianne:** My mother, relatives and teachers all provided early encouragement. My first grade teacher was a strong influence as well as each successive teacher in grade school. (There were no art classes in Warren County public schools.) Each adult

*"I participate in the Artspace mentorship program where interested local high school students work one on one with artists in a mutually beneficial program."*

paid special attention to me, told me I was artistically talented and proclaimed I would be a professional artist one day. With each new grade, each new teacher made me responsible for creating the monthly changing bulletin boards. In high school, many of those teachers commissioned me to do paintings.

I was the second born in a family of six children (1952) and we did not have a lot materially. My mother would cut out the bottoms and up one side of grocery bags to provide me with drawing paper. We lived in rural Warren County between

Macon and Embro, near Warrenton, and grew our own food. To earn extra money, my mother would sell vegetables to folks in Warrenton. Often I would go with her on her route and got to know many of these influential people. They later gave Mama money to be used for art materials. There were no art supply stores in the area in the 60s, but there was a Sears catalogue! One of Mama's regular customers gave her \$300 for art supplies for me as I needed. I still have my first wooden paint box.

Another of the vegetable route ladies was encouraging and gracious. Her daughter had attended college in Boston studying art and interior design but unfortunately had died with spinal meningitis. Mrs. Nunn called one day and said she wanted to give me all her daughter's college art materials and books. That was a real boon to me as a teenager and provided a great source of fine art books and inspiration.

Each summer, I spent a week with two different aunts and uncles and cousins. My Uncle Byrd took me to my first real art supply store in Winston and let me purchase several materials including my first fan brush. (Currently I have a solo exhibition of 25 paintings at the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce.)

During my junior high school years, an art teacher from Hen-





derson, N.C. traveled one Friday a week to offer private classes after school in the library to those who could afford one dollar per class. My family could not afford this luxury, but the ladies of the Macon Women's Club paid for my classes with professional artist Lelia Brigham who provided much personal attention and encouragement. We are still in contact today. The Club also sponsored me in art competitions across the state, paying for professional framing and providing transportation.

In the twelfth grade one of my teachers entered my work in a competition in which I won a National Scholastic Achievement Award in Art. The teacher purchased the winning oil painting and has it still.

My best friend's mother, Mrs. John Boyd Davis, was also a strong influence. She was the Girl Scout leader and often took me on trips to Raleigh. Mrs. Davis also took me to Ruth Green's first Little Art Gallery in 1968, located in North Hills. That one particular visit to that gallery changed my life. I had seen paintings in a real commercial gallery and knew that day what I wanted to do – have my own art in a professional gallery. Now she carries my work in her Little Art Gallery in Cameron Village, all these years later

Throughout my life, up until her death this summer, my mother was my biggest fan! She taught me about the natural world, about kindness and about giving. During my high school years, Mama would always say after supper, "you go paint, I'll do the dishes!" Now that's encouragement!

**W.E.:** *How do you grow as an artist and develop new mediums?*

**Dianne:** I evolve by studying and doing. I have always been blessed (or cursed) with a natural, almost deadly curiosity about creating with different mediums. My father was a mechanic, so I grew up watching him work with his hands and admiring the things he could do. I grew up in the house my father and mother built by hand, next door to my grandfather and grandmother. Daddy's father was a carpenter for the railroad and I also admired his handwork. My grandmother was a fine quilter with a green thumb.

I try to take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves or create them. My professional career began in Montana in 1974 after studying painting, drawing and design at the College of Great Falls. Montana was an artist's dream come true. The many contemporary artists there in the 70s were lucky to have a receptive, buying, collecting public (even teenagers saved their money to invest in original art!) due to the successes of native C. M Russell, famous Western Cowboy artist.

While living in beautiful Big Sky Country for almost 10 years, I literally painted myself into a corner with realistic railroad art (in oils, acrylics and watercolor). It was a refreshing change to move back to native N.C. where I could reinvent myself in the art market.

I find it impossible NOT to keep growing, keep learning new techniques that are intriguing, keep evolving – through workshops and classes, instructional videos and books – whatever is inspiring and by whatever means possible.

**W.E.:** *What are your favorites types of art and techniques?*

**Dianne:** Tough question!! I love it all and would have to say my favorites change with the seasons. If I had to pick one medium, that would most likely be oil painting, my first love. Then I get



*(Continued on next page)*

Dianne Rodwell... (Continued from page 53)

a wild hair and have to express myself with immediacy and turn to faster drying water-based mediums like acrylics or watercolor. Encaustic is also immediate although the studio set up

---

**“I had seen paintings in a real commercial gallery and knew that day what I wanted to do – have my own art in a professional gallery.”**

---

time is involved...lots of tools, lots of equipment and a constant source of heat.

I work in so many different media, the only way to keep up with it all is to create work in series like the 3D Chamber Dreams Papered Lantern Series, the watercolor Fantasy Landscape Series, the oil Water Garden/Fish Frenzy Series, the Batik on Rice Paper Series, the Encaustic on Tile Series...

**W.E.:** Do you work with budding artists? I see that you teach classes. Why is that important to you?

**Dianne:** I usually work (paint) alone. Quiet time is essential to focus on the selected creative project and follow through the thought process. Many students from local schools and statewide colleges come to Artspace to interview artists for a school paper or inquire about the process for a specific work and I am always happy to answer questions and spend some time with them.

I participate in the Artspace mentorship program where interested local high school students work one-on-one with artists in a mutually beneficial program. This is a very positive program and a great way for a student to be immersed in the cre-

ative environment with professional artists working in their chosen mediums.

I am a founding artist member of Artspace and happy to have operated an open working studio for 21 years. Raleigh is fortunate to have a place such as this, where ANYONE can walk into one of the 25 studios and strike up a conversation with a working professional artist. I think it takes some of the intimidation out of the art world for some of the boundaries to be removed and make art and artists so available to the public. Artspace is the 2nd largest open working studio environment in the US, following only the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, VA (after whom we are fashioned).

I teach 3-4 encaustic workshops a year at Jerry's Artarama (they can handle the electricity load of several crazed wax artists all working at once with hot griddles, electric irons, hot air guns and specialty heated tools! and they are the only local vendor for encaustic supplies). My time is otherwise spent as a production studio artist creating works for my own studio/gallery at Artspace as well as several other galleries and year-round competitions. I really enjoy teaching encaustics because the workshop participants are always amazed at what they can create with this versatile, ancient medium. It is especially rewarding to be a part of handing down ancient traditions in the encaustic basics and offering insight to modern technology with a twist to ancient methods. There are so many approaches to working with encaustics making the medium appealing to many contemporary artists.

My works, no matter the medium, are informed by the natural world.

One of my favorite quotes:  
*Everybody needs beauty as well as bread,  
places to play in and pray in,  
where Nature may heal and cheer  
and give strength to body and soul alike.*  
John Muir (1838-1914)  
Scottish-born American naturalist and writer

For more information, visit [diannerodwell.com](http://diannerodwell.com)

