

# Life in *color*

*Painter uses art as an outlet, to address world issues*

Story by Andrew Merica | Photography by Melissa Rodgers

If Anna Ryan Drew gets a good idea for a painting in the middle of the night, she springs out of bed, runs into her studio, hastily slams her hands against the wall to find the light switch, turns her music all the way up and starts in, a brush in each hand, spreading her feelings and emotions wildly across the canvas.

She does that because she's an artist, and that's what artists do, right?

Wrong. She doesn't do that at all.

"This is not a Woody Allen movie," Anna said. "I am not that person. If I'm asleep and I get an idea, I'll go back to bed. Usually I don't get ideas in the middle of the night, and if I do, I'll go back to sleep and play it out in the morning. ... I'm not a crazy person."

In fact, those who know Anna would likely say she is one of the most down-to-earth artists you'll ever meet, though you wouldn't know it

from her paintings.

Anna's paintings, which can be found scattered about her Granger, Indiana, home, are abstract — "expressionistic," as she calls them. Many paintings are patterns of colors, evoking feelings of happiness, grief or relaxation. Other paintings depict images: people, flowers, mountains and the like.

But despite the broad, emotional and even metaphysical quality to many of her paintings, Anna says her art is not meant to display her raw feelings brazenly gushed out through the colors and shapes.

"I don't think there's a reactive nature to my producing something," she said.

Instead, Anna varies her work, sometimes painting happy scenery, and sometimes painting more serious topics — none of them, however, rushed to the canvas as soon as they popped into her head.





Anna Ryan Drew's art and clothing can be found on Luxe Wagon and on her Facebook page under A. R. Drew.

“There’s a lot of people that are in positions in this world that are not ideal,” she said. “Some of my paintings reflect those situations, and some of them don’t. Some are sunshiney, and some reflect the suffering of people.”

Anna met her husband, Brian, shortly after high school and right before they began studying at the University of Michigan. After receiving her bachelor of fine arts, she went back and received a master’s degree in social work.

She was a mental health professional for around 10 years. When Anna had her son, Max, six years ago, she discontinued her social work, though she did not discontinue her passion for helping those in need. Through her husband’s job, Anna has been able to donate several paintings to auctions to raise money to help people, especially children, who are less fortunate.

“I feel most proud of the events that I’ve done locally that produce the most money for good causes,” she said.

Anna takes her understanding of social injustice and love of helping those in need and applies it to her art and creative process. Anna is not in the habit of rushing home from a bad day to go to the studio without

first digesting and synthesizing her feelings.

Then, and only then, does she transform them into art — and that’s only a portion of what she paints.

“I have a body of work that is very varied in its content,” Anna said. “It’s all real, it’s all good,” but she does not have to only paint feelings and emotions.

Most of the time, Anna said she paints for the sake of being creative. That creativity, a pragmatic (rather than an impulsive) creativity, is at the center of Anna’s life, and it has been ever since childhood.

Anna is the middle child of Niles artist Nancy Swan Drew. Her older brother, Mitt, is an attorney, and her younger sister, Maggie, is a photographer.

“I have memories of being in the studio at like 3 or 4 years old,” Anna said. “I feel like I’ve always been drawn to (art) because it was just there all the time.”

Anna said that her mother is her largest influence because of the whimsical, artistic environment that she grew up in — an environment that, Anna says, not many children have the fortune of growing up in today.

As a teacher of children’s studio art classes, Anna notices how children are sometimes afraid to create art without being given an assignment.

“I wonder if kids are getting enough self expression without being dictated or told what it should look like in the end,” she said.

With time, however, Anna said that the children realize how great it is to express themselves.

“They’re thrilled that they just got to make something.”

Anna, in turn, likes to make things as well — beyond just paintings. Recently, she began selling clothing with her paintings printed on them after getting the idea from her neighbor, a home décor store owner.

“He was showing me something printed on a piece of clothing,” she said. That was when she got the idea to put her paintings on clothing as well.

Combine her painting and fashion designing with a three-times-a-week love for dancing, and you get a perfect life of creativity — the life that Anna Ryan Drew proudly leads; a life that doesn’t have to involve Woody Allen-style drama, but a life that utilizes creativity simply because she enjoys it.

“I don’t think about anything else but creating something,” she said. “People don’t get enough of that. What a gift (for my mother) to give me and my sister: to be able to create like that.” ♦

