

# INSIDE OUT

*Watercolor artist Andrea Durfee  
goes with the flow*

BY ROBIN L. FLANIGAN

If she's in her attic studio at her South Wedge home, especially in winter, watercolor artist and printmaker Andrea Durfee is bundled up in hat and coat in front of her easel, the space heater inches away. But at her work studio in Penfield, she can often pause her brush—perhaps one inherited from her great-great-grandfather Bradey—to look in the mirror. She'll position her body, maybe just an arm, the way she wants a figure in her painting to position an arm.

Durfee demonstrates, letting her adolescent years of training as a dancer show as she bends at the elbow and holds her fingers like a graceful ballet dancer.

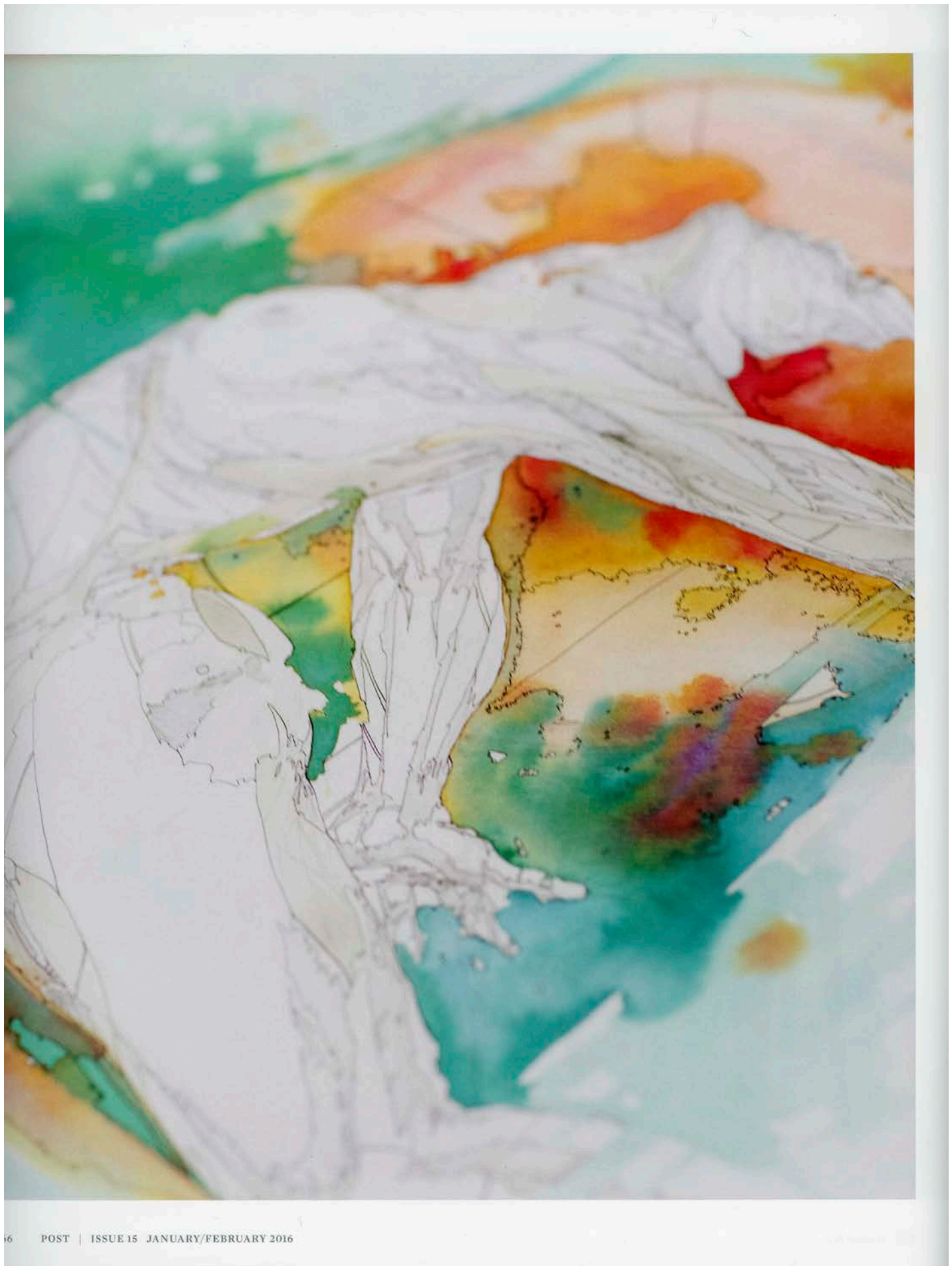
"I wanted to move to New York and be a dancer, so I think I always knew that you interpret emotions using art," she says. "Whether it's pain or frustration or joy, it's definitely how I've processed any sort of emotional upheaval, big or small."

Thirty-one-year-old Durfee studied art at Rochester Institute of Technology but left after giving birth to her only child, son Carlin, in 2004. "I wasn't creating any artwork at that point and I felt that," she recalls. "There was a sense of self missing."











Three years later Durfee enrolled at Nazareth College, where she earned a bachelor's degree in studio art with a concentration in printmaking. "It was a real release when I went back [to school], and I felt like I was able to explore a lot more," she says. A master's degree in creative arts therapy from Nazareth led to a job as a licensed art therapist working with teens in residential treatment and day centers at Hillside Children's Center from 2011 to 2014, a time when she decided to join her sister-in-law, Ashley Durfee, in opening artisan invitation and stationery company Louelle Design Studio. That move paved the way for her to further explore her own work.

"Printmaking still certainly had my heart, but with the lack of a press I turned to watercolor and really just fell in love with it," she says. "It's about the strokes and the water and it being organic and respecting the material. It's kind of a centering thing."

When she's not sketching at the breakfast table or in her attic, Durfee works out of Louelle's design and production space (which has an etching press so she can make prints again) at the end of an industrial park, in an old beer-bottling warehouse.

In September she showed for the fourth time at the M&T Bank Clothesline Festival, where she received a merit award in 2009 for her reduction prints; this was the first year all her pieces were watercolor. Her first solo show ran through October, an eight-week exhibit called "Archetypes" at Rochester Brainerd, in which feathers and other animalistic qualities were incorporated into the human figure.

She tends to favor earth tones, lots of ochres and grays and browns and blacks, but finds pastel shades of blues and purple and pink sneaking in more than she'd like. "God, I



hate pastels," she laments. "It's funny, because I don't even want to say the word 'pastel.' But that's what they are. I just have to own that."

It's more about the big picture anyway. Durfee credits her love for narrative storytelling for helping her piece small fragments into a larger experience, in particular her admiration for books such as Sandra Cisneros' "Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories."

"Her descriptions are so visual, and she can have joy and pain in the same emotion," she notes. "I try to translate that into what I'm doing, to transcend culture and language. I think that's a wonderful thing art can do."

Sometimes Durfee's translations happen while listening to gypsy jazz or reggae, other times in silence. "I'm definitely a daydreamer, so sometimes I'm back in time, sometimes forward when I try to pull everything together," she says. "I really do try to make it about mindfulness, though, about being in the moment."

Next on her to-do list: researching galleries and sending out proposals.

"I'm still learning the ins and outs of the business of art," she acknowledges, "and we have a really great community here in Rochester so there's no shortage of people to turn to if I have a question. Everyone's really happy to see other people doing different things."

While she has started exploring incorporating figures into watercolor landscapes ("I'm very interested in that tension between us and the earth"), printmaking will always have her heart—and other parts of her too.

"I love the physicality of it," she explains. "The carving of the linoleum, the rolling and pressing. It's a whole-body experience. Your hands and arms are sore the next day and you could have nicks. The battle wounds of that are wonderful. I like a good scar."

