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THE *NATURAL*

One local Raleigh artist rediscovers a passion within her and allows it to take her in new directions.

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When Emily Anne Farrell was about six or seven, she was sent to time-out, as children often are. After a while, her Aunt Robbins came to check on her and discovered Emily finishing a beautiful crown she'd made for herself—full of color, different materials, and, above all, ingenuity. An artist herself, Aunt Robbins praised Farrell for her creation, and it was in that encouragement that Farrell found comfort in loving art. She even began learning the basics from her aunt. Instead of going outside to play, she would sit and craft, color, and paint. In time-outs, she would create. In math class, she would doodle. For gifts, she would craft. The creating made her feel calm, at home, and, most of all, herself.

When she was accepted to North Carolina State University, Farrell wanted to apply to the graphic design program. But when she realized that she needed a full portfolio of work to present to get in, she opted for another major—after all, art was a passion, not necessarily a career path. So after high school, the creating, the crafting, and the painting faded into the background. “After I got married in 2011, I didn’t have the space to create, so I just didn’t,” Farrell says.

About four years ago, however, Farrell felt that her home needed some art, so she commissioned two watercolors from her favorite local artist, Caroline Boykin. “Something about that



process awakened something in me, and I wanted more art. I just didn't have the wallet for it. I felt pulled to create it myself," Farrell recalls. So she went to Jerry's Artarama and picked up some canvases, went home and pulled out paints and brushes she hadn't used in a decade—and she got to work.

"The whole time I was painting, I think my husband thought I was nuts," Farrell says. "He had no idea that was in me, and so he was sending pictures to my friends, saying, 'Did you know she could do this?!' All I got back was encouragement."

After a few months, Farrell wanted to get some unbiased reactions to her artwork, so she took to her Facebook "moms' group" and posted images of all she'd been working on. "The group was largely focused on home decor, and mostly located in Charlotte, so I felt it was a safe space to post where not many people would know me if my work was horrible," Farrell says. She sold all of her work in four days and got several commissions from strangers. "It was the perfect motivation I needed to keep going," she says. And just like her Aunt Robbins, these people gave her space to find comfort in her artwork, to pursue it naturally.

Her process, much like her passion, just comes to her. She begins by sketching out her piece with pencil or paint, just to get a starting point. From there, she layers acrylic paint and pastels. "I use acrylics because that's all I knew, but now it's practical because it dries fast," Farrell laughs. "I added pastels for mark-making a while back, and earlier this year, I began using oil sticks. I love the texture they bring to my pieces." She underpaints with "something





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fun” like hot pink, just to get warmed up, and from there, she paints “what feels right.” She adds, “It’s hard to know when to stop sometimes, but I’ve gotten better and more confident at making those decisions. The best is the butterfly feeling I get when I’m particularly happy with how something finished.”

Farrell says her favorites change pretty regularly, but at the moment, it’s a piece called *The Stories We Tell*, which is on display now at ArtSource Fine Art in Raleigh, where Farrell is represented. “I love the colors and the style—it’s a bit different from my usual style, which I seem to be leaning into more,” Farrell explains.

As for what’s next, any goal she has for her painting lies squarely and comfortably in just bringing joy. “I enjoy the outlet, but most of all, I love knowing I’m making someone’s space a little bit brighter and bringing some happy to the world for that person. I have no plans or expectations, and I’m OK with that,” Farrell shares. “I enjoy the surprises this journey brings me.”

