

## The Language of Paint

### *Tracy Keeler Budd '80, artist*

by Karen Doss Bowman '91

As an art student at Bridgewater College, Tracy Keeler Budd '80 never aspired to teach, concentrating instead on studio art. Over the past two decades, however, Budd has emerged as one of the Roanoke Valley's top artists and art educators.

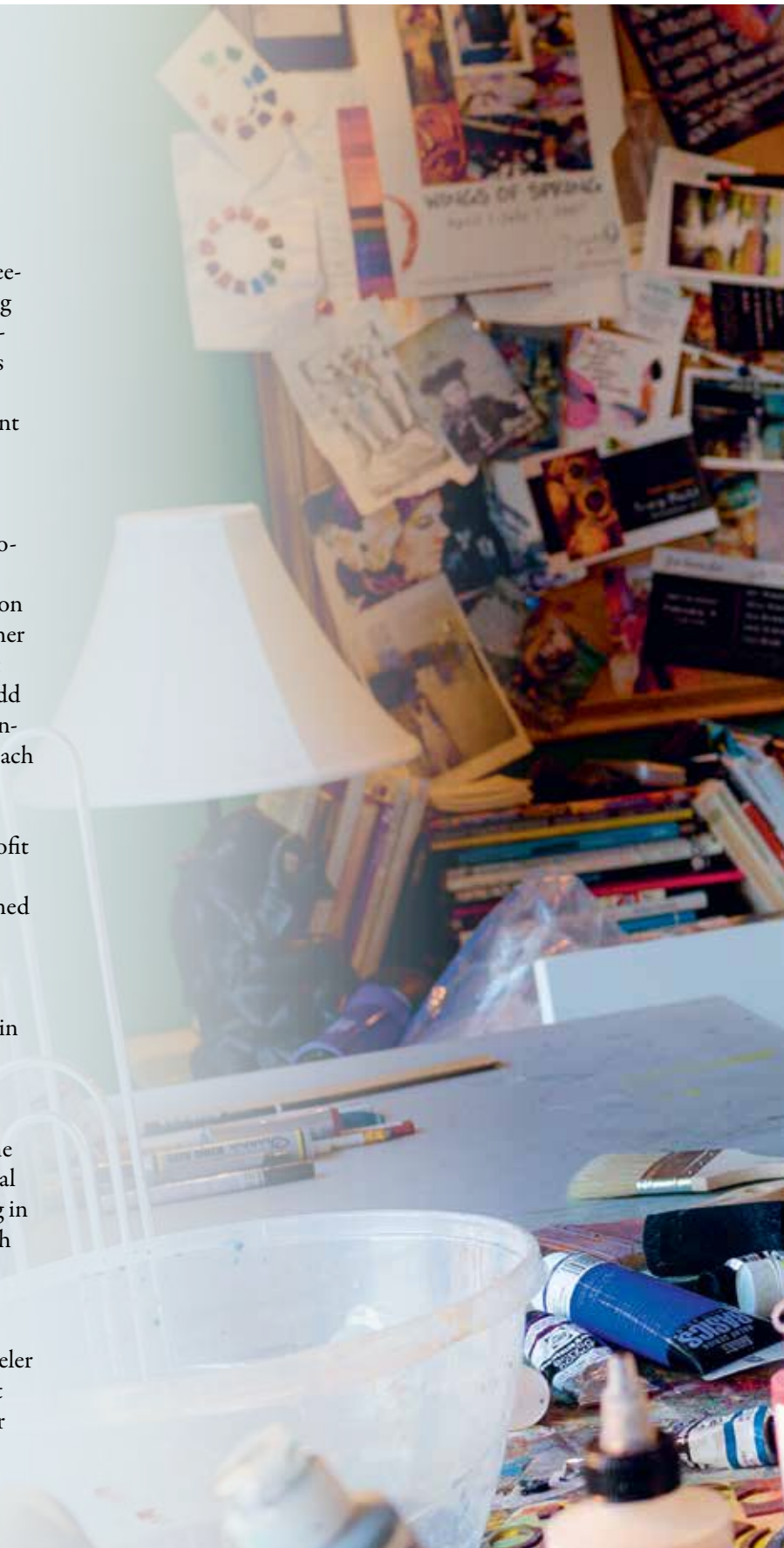
"I could never have anticipated when I was a student at Bridgewater how much I would love to teach," said Budd. "Teaching really gets me excited about my own work, and having to explain art techniques to others makes me think a little more clearly about what I'm doing in my own creative journey."


Budd's teaching career grew out of her dissatisfaction with art education in the public schools as she raised her three children. Wanting her children to learn basic art techniques and to develop an appreciation for art, Budd established For Art's Sake children's art camps. The venture was successful, and parents began asking her to teach them, as well. Budd stopped running the camps when her children outgrew them, but she has been a faculty member for 15 years at The Studio School—a non-profit art school in Roanoke, Va.

Her course, "Painting Basics and Beyond," is designed for beginning to intermediate painters and covers all the elements of painting, from the basics of color and composition to value and texture. A firm believer that students learn best from watching professional artists in action, Budd does weekly painting demonstrations to pass on tips and techniques.

"What I love about teaching is the people I get to meet," said Budd, whose students range in age from the teens to 92. "The nature of art is that it's a very personal thing. The people in my classes may not have anything in common except the art, but everyone gets close to each other because they just share so much."

A painter since she was 10 years old, Budd grew up on a farm in Rockingham County, Va., and is the daughter of Bridgewater College life trustee James Keeler '57 (former Chair of the Board), and Sandra Barnhart Keeler '70, a former voice teacher at the College. After graduating from Bridgewater, Budd and her husband





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- TRACY KEELER BUDD '80

Patrick Budd '79, moved to Roanoke, where she worked as a graphic designer and painted portraits on commission. But Budd began struggling with motivation to complete the portrait projects.

"It got to the point where every commission looked alike because people wanted a certain look they'd seen in other paintings," Budd said. "It didn't feel creative to me, and it didn't feel like art. I wanted to develop my style and to paint from my heart."

After finishing the portraits to which she had committed, Budd decided to start painting for herself, and "it opened up a complete world for me," she said. "When you paint for yourself, you just discover who you are as an artist and what your language is in paint."

Budd works in acrylics, starting out with a transparent and watery texture, which she layers and builds to a consistency that is similar to oil paint. She's very focused on creating depth in the surfaces of her paintings with a rich mixture of layers and textures.

"A few years ago, I realized that what I was after in my work wasn't really about *what* I was painting but *how* I was painting it," explained Budd, noting that she is focused on everyday subjects, such as the way a shadow hits a person's face. "Paint really is a language, and it's a creative way that I give something of myself and express something that's important to me. It doesn't matter so much what the subject is. What matters to me is the surface of the paint—how the layers go on, the textures that you see through layers and the colors that form. It becomes a very sophisticated surface. That's what keeps me painting."



"Retired #1," acrylic/watermedia

A founding member of the Signature 9 Gallery in downtown Roanoke, which closed in April after 12 years, Budd shows her work at local, regional and national shows. Her pieces are displayed at The Market Gallery in Roanoke, Lindor Arts in Roanoke and Hot Springs Gallery in Hot Springs, Va.

Budd has fond memories of her art courses at Bridgewater, and especially of the late Professor Paul Kline.

"I loved how small the school was and how the art students were really close to each other," said Budd. "I felt like I got really good hands-on, basic instruction at Bridgewater. The instructors had a lot of time to give me. That was important because art is a very personal journey, and it gets richer as you get older. You learn techniques in school, but when you get out of school, you learn what you're trying to say as an artist. Art isn't copying a photograph. It's putting paint down in a way that makes someone feel something." —



Photos by  
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