



# Creating Places

Local multimedia artist Ann Tarantino shifts her focus to community-minded projects.

BY SABAH RUPACE

Though she would often be making things like collages as a child, competitive swimming dominated much of artist Ann Tarantino's young life.

A career-ending shoulder injury early in college forced a reset. "Prior to that," Tarantino says, "my creativity had been expressed through my body. And then I had to figure out a different way to do that." Feeling like she was making up for lost time, she took every art class she could.

The structure and labor of being an athlete is more similar to arming than people might think, she points out. "My practice as an artist is much more rooted in that orderly approach that I took as an athlete, where it's like you're training every day. And that's hard because sometimes you don't feel like it or everything you're making is kind of bad, you know like it's not working. And there's always a lot of things that don't survive. I am kind of ruthless. I discarded a lot of things."

She's not one to wait for inspiration to

strike, because she's learned that approach just doesn't work for her. She's also not one to walk into her sun-soaked home studio and lose herself in her painting for 10 hours. Her projects include a fair amount of administrative work. She enjoys the process of cleaning her studio and knowing where everything is before she dives in. And she listens to podcasts such as *I Like Your Work* and *Artist/Marble* while she creates.

Tarantino was born in Massachusetts and grew up in New England. She received a BA with honors in visual arts from Brown and earned her MFA in painting from Penn State, where she met her husband, Jacob Loverich. They share three children, twins Stella and Luca, who are in sixth grade, and 3-year-old Leda.

Tarantino was an assistant teaching professor of art at Penn State for 15 years. She also taught drawing classes in the Department of Landscape Architecture. For five years, she was also the director of the Woskob Family Gallery

in downtown State College.

Like many others, she realized during the pandemic that she didn't want to return to life the way it was before. Balancing teaching and her studio practice often led to her own work not getting enough time.

She left Penn State to focus on her art, shifting toward projects that are more community engaged. While being an artist can be solitary and lonely, she says she realized during her time at the Woskob how much she enjoyed the connection component.

In the past year, Tarantino has created three large-scale public projects in State College borough — *Color Block*, a 7-foot-by-250-foot mural in Sidney Friedman Parklet that was brought to life with the help of dozens of volunteers; *You Are Here*, a 13-by-17 mural commissioned by 3 Dots for the central commons terrace; and *Future Forward*, a 100-by-80 painting on the basketball court at Cord Street Elementary School.

"It was really exciting to have that Ann



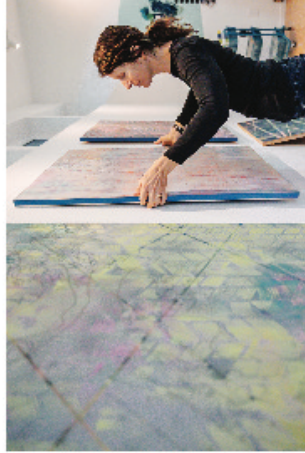
Renaissance," says Erika Quinn, 3 Dots' executive director. Quinn wanted to work with a woman artist for the mural at 3 Dots and felt that the dynamism of Tarantino's work was a good fit with how energetic 3 Dots is as a space. "She's visually savvy," Quinn says. "I think she's a delight to work with."

*You Are Here* layers different stories into a plane. Tarantino pulled references from local topographical maps and researched immigration of refugees coming into Centre County, Quinn says. She thought about the actual drawings people made during the community engagement session for the project. She thought about the curvature of the land and star navigation.

"All of these things become compressed into this dense layer of memory, of idea and of meaning," Quinn says of the mural. "And so I think that's very exciting — but I like that she does it in a way that's graphically playful, that is bombastic in a certain way and has these abstractions. So it's not a literal representation; I think it leaves a lot of space for people to enter it."

While abstraction can sometimes leave people behind, Quinn adds, Tarantino executes it in a way that has intergenerational appeal and is accessible.

Tarantino is a community-minded artist



who makes space for public art to be for everyone, as it should be.

Tarantino describes her work as "abstracted landscapes, vibrant, colorful, celebratory."

Tarantino often draws inspiration from spent formative years in Japan and Brazil that also influence her work — from attention to detail in Kyoto to the brightly painted buildings of São Paulo. (Her stint in São Paulo in 2016-17 was thanks to a Fulbright Core Scholar Award.)

And her scope of what constitutes a landscape is expansive. "One of the stories of a landscape," she says, "is the people who move through it and experience it."

Her public projects and commissioned work often stem from keywords, which she then communicates through color, shape, form and line.

In *Color Block*, the Borough of State College wanted to emphasize "a welcoming and engaged community."

Something she's happy to be a part of. "Having the luxury of a little more time and financial freedom here is really extraordinary," Tarantino says. "I miss living in New York, but I make much better work here and I'm much happier here just as a citizen and as a human." ❏

