



# *Pouring One's Self.* Into Learning

FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF HER GRANDFATHER AND HER WELL-KNOWN MENTOR, **SANDY DELEHANTY** HAS TRAVELED THE WORLD ON HER ARTISTIC TALENT AND NOW ADVOCATES FOR OTHER CREATIVES.

By Michael Woodson

**T**hey say the best teacher is life itself—that you never stop learning as long as you allow for the student in you to thrive. Artist Sandy Delehanty grew up in a small town, but she had big ambitions and a family who valued education. Surrounded by an encouraging community, she went from being one of 11 students in her grade school class to an artist who has taught throughout Europe, has shown in galleries and museums across the country, and is on the board of directors for an organization actively changing the lives of women artists.

## Seeing the World

Delehanty was raised in Fort Jones, Calif., “population 525,” she says with a laugh. “There were six girls and five boys in my first-grade class. I was the kid with the crayons and the colored pencils.” Attending college was naturally a big change after living in a small corner of the world. “I’d visited Grandma in Los Angeles, so I’d been to the city before, but this was a big deal.” She earned her bachelor of arts degree from California State University, in Chico, and, at the suggestion of her beloved grandfather, stayed an extra year and earned her teaching credentials. “My grandfather was a kind, wonderful man,” she says. “He had a sixth-grade education, but really appreciated education. He told me, ‘You really haven’t finished your education until you get out and see the world.’ So I did.”



ABOVE  
**Masai Warriors**  
(watercolor on paper, 14x18)

OPPOSITE  
**Notre Dame**  
(watercolor on paper, 24x18)

Six months after graduation in 1968, Delehanty and her friend, Christine, decided to backpack across Europe. “We worked two jobs all summer and fall, then took off in February,” she says. They backpacked from February through July, at which point the duo was low on finances and stumbled upon a creative way to earn some money. “I was sketching at the Trevi Fountain, in Rome, and an American woman came up to me,” she says. She wanted to know if I’d sell my



**Santorini Windmill**  
(watercolor on paper, 14x10)

introduced her to his Aunt Betty. “Anybody who knows the watercolor world, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, knows who she is, because she wrote magazine articles about sketching.”

Her name was Betty Lynch. “She was very passionate about watercolor,” Delehanty says. “She told me, ‘Look, this should be your medium. You can paint on the kitchen table. You can take it with you.’ She gave me a list of supplies and told me to go get a watercolor set.”

So Delehanty began painting again—on nights, weekends, summer vacations, whenever she found the time—and Betty served as her mentor. “When I’d see her, she’d look at my work, critique it and tell me what I needed to do next,” Delehanty says. “I just fell in love with the medium, and I’ve been working in it ever since.”

Lynch’s influence extended well beyond the paintbrush. Every summer she taught a watercolor sketching class in Italy, which gave Delehanty an idea—and a way to return to Europe. “I researched tour companies that offered watercolor workshops, and I became an instructor,” she says. From 2003 to 2018, the artist taught every summer at least once, and sometimes twice, in Europe, as well as in Bali. Now she’s a full-time artist, but she reflects fondly on those years. “I got to hang out in Europe,” she says, “and I got to know so many wonderful artists from all around the world.”

drawing to her, so I sold it for five dollars.” Encouraged by the exchange, Delehanty sought to strike gold twice. “I sketched another one, and a German lady was watching me sketch. So, Christine got out her German translation book to figure out how to sell the other one for five dollars.”

For the next two months, Delehanty (then signing her work as San Farley) sold her work using dipping pens, a bottle of black India ink and a little pad of 8x10-inch drawing paper. “In 1969, you could stay in hostels, hitchhike and travel through Europe for five dollars a day,” she reminisces, “so I financed the last two months of our trip by selling sketches to tourists. I had found a way to earn a living.”

## Arriving at Watercolor

Delehanty eventually married and took a job in London, working for IBM for three years before moving back to the United States. Her marriage ended, and as a single working mother of a young son, she just wasn’t making art. Seven years later, she married Burke Delehanty, and in 1985, he

## A Fresh Perspective

Delehanty’s artist statement reads, in part, “When I stop learning, that’s the day my work will become mechanical, predictable, boring.” Part of that “always learning” mantra is finding new ways to represent age-old subjects.

Take *Notre Dame* (page 00), a painting Delehanty says is of utmost importance to her career. “I was teaching a workshop in France and before the workshop started, my friend Bobby and I traveled to Paris,” she says. “We were sketching Notre Dame in our journals and wondering aloud how many thousands of artists must have painted the cathedral. I love the building so much. I thought, ‘I’ve got to do a painting of this.’” But the artist wanted to do more than simply paint a subject universally admired and easily recognized; she wanted to find a fresh perspective.

With Bobby by her side, Delehanty snapped photos on her phone without looking, Bobby directing her with “up,”

“down” and “oops, you got some sky, lower it.” “We opened up the pictures later at a café and came across this one, and it was the winner,” she says. “I’d been spinning through pictures, and it stopped us in our tracks.”

When she returned home, she decided to try a new approach—pouring paint—a technique that led to a whole reimagining of her work. “I took that photo of Notre Dame and sketched it onto watercolor paper,” the artist says. “I masked it with Incredible White Mask. I put it on with a palette knife and I saved the whites. Then I mixed three primary colors in water and poured them over the wet paper. After the paint and surface had dried overnight, I masked the next lightest area in the painting. Then I poured again, and I just kept going, working from light to dark. That painting features about 25 pours.”

*Notre Dame* was Delehanty’s first painting to be accepted into the American Watercolor Society (AWS) for

its traveling exhibition, in 2018; *Havana Laundry* (below) was the second, in 2019, and *Central Park Sunday* (page 00) was the third, also in 2019. “The pouring of paintings has really changed my style,” she says. There’s a duality between reality and abstraction at play in them. Her subjects are often ordinary—scenes we might find and see in our everyday lives, on commutes or outside our windows. But the pouring process—and the colors she chooses—bring something playful to the work that both honors the subjects and changes them. It’s a fresh perspective, indeed.

## American Women Artists

In addition to her full-time focus on art, Delehanty also helps bring equal opportunity to the professional art world. To illustrate why the issue of gender equality needs attention, Delehanty posed a question. “Consider all the art

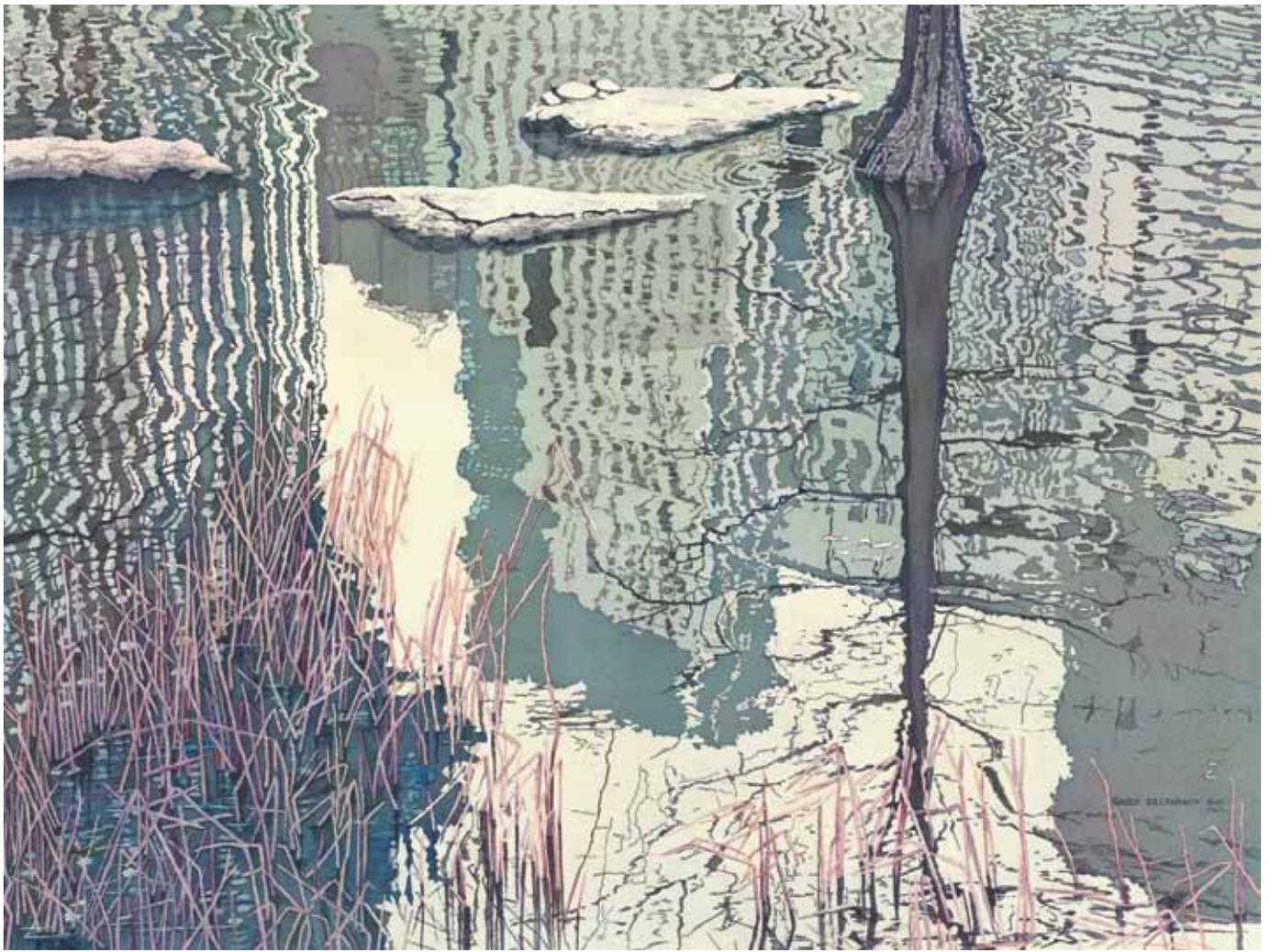
museums in the United States,” she says, “and focus on their permanent collections. What percentage of the collection in any art museum in the United States do you think was created by women? What’s your guess?” I considered it, and hoping to be wrong, guessed 10 percent. “Actually, that’s twice as good. It’s 5 percent,” Delehanty says. The majority of U.S. art museums feature between 3 and 5 percent women artists in their collection. Delehanty serves on the board of a nonprofit determined to change that.

Formed in the early 1990s by a group of accomplished female oil painters and sculptors, American Women Artists (AWA) is an organization that, according to its website ([americanwomenartists.org](http://americanwomenartists.org)), helps “women achieve their dream of becoming professional artists ... overcome barriers and create opportunities equivalent to those commonplace to their male counterparts.”

Delehanty became an AWA executive board member last year, after having shown her work in the organization’s museum exhibition. “I realized this show really made a difference to my resume, and then I was invited to join its board



**Havana Laundry**  
(watercolor on paper, 24x18)



Central Park Sunday (watercolor on paper, 18x24)

of directors. I'd never been on a board before, but it seemed like the right thing to do."

The organization recently launched its "25 in 25" campaign, which is committed to sponsoring 25 women-centric museum shows in 25 years. "We just had our fourth museum show at Steamboat Art Museum, in Colorado," Delehanty says. "We're starting with small museums and have the next four years planned. Museums are now starting to seek us out." She continues, "They're juried shows," she continues, "and the entries we're receiving include very high-quality names. Consequently, we're starting to receive invitations from big museums and galleries."

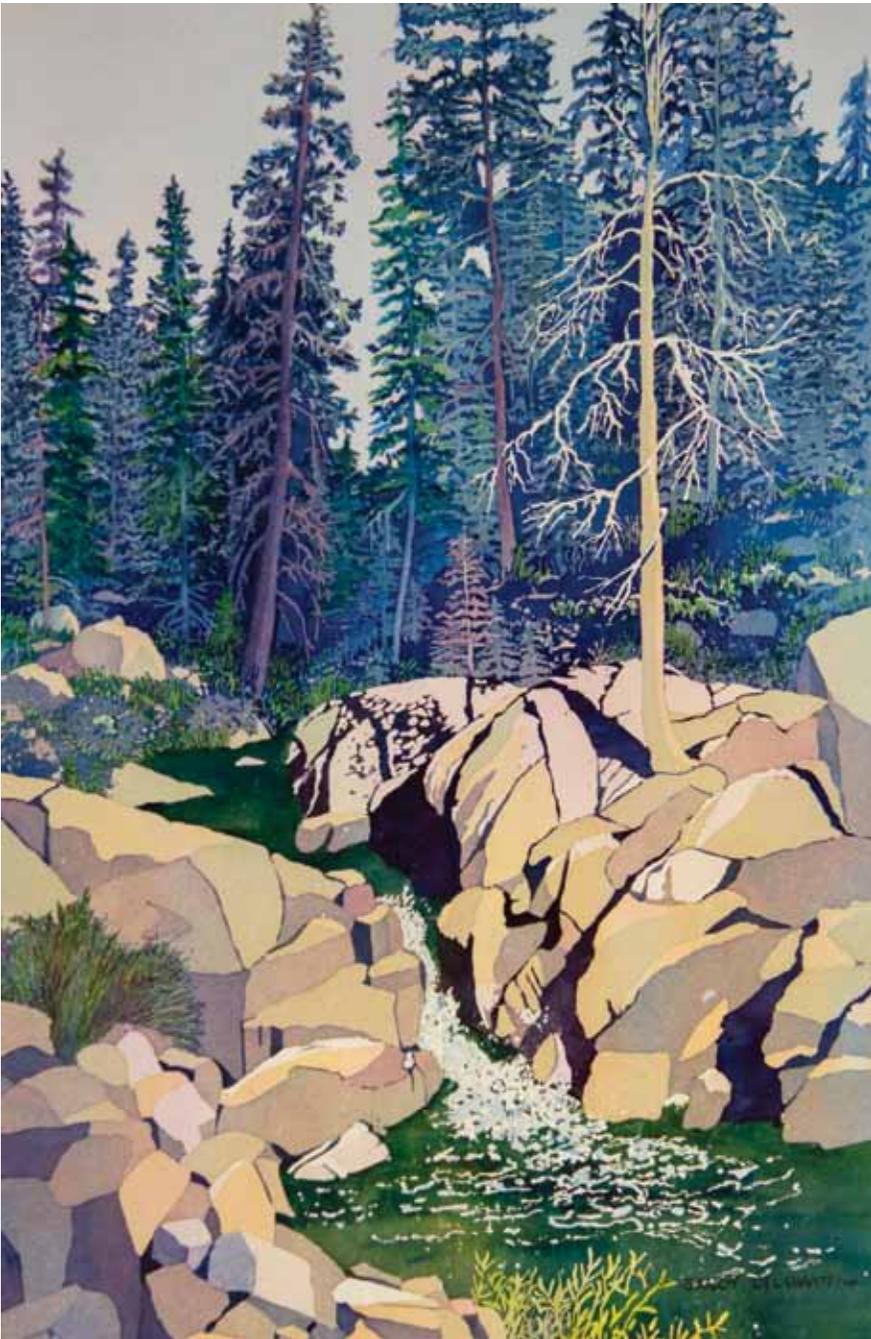
The mission and the organization's reach seem to be having a domino effect. "AWA had a show at the RS Hanna Gallery, in Fredericksburg, Texas," she says. "I was included in the show, so I went to see it. What I saw blew me away.

"After the show, I was gallery-hopping with some friends, and we were all still wearing our name tags from the show reception," the artist continues. "We walked into a gallery, and the owner read my name tag and remembered seeing my watercolor at the other gallery. She asked me to talk to her the next day, and that's when she invited me to show my work in her gallery. We're gaining steam."

## Remembering Aunt Betty's Advice

AWA is Delehanty's large-scale pay-it-forward project, her way of offering help and advice to artists the same way her Aunt Betty did—for the new era. "When Betty was first helping me, she could see I was serious about painting as a career," she says. "She told me, 'You have to sign your paintings with your initial. Don't sign your first name, because if you do, you're not going to get into the shows you enter.' I signed my first name from day one, but she found it necessary to tell me that. She had experienced discrimination herself, and she felt it necessary to advise me as a younger female artist. That was part of her canon of advice."

It's that mindset that Delehanty, along with AWA, hopes to change. But in remembering her own artist's statement, Delehanty's advice extends even further. "Look for workshops with a teacher who paints in an entirely different way than you paint—who has an entirely different style than yours, who maybe does something that you have absolutely no idea how to do," she says, "and then sign up for that workshop. You'll be so far out of your



**South Fork on the Yuba River**  
(watercolor on paper, 18x12)

comfort zone that you'll probably be frustrated. When you go back home, don't stop. Don't put all the materials away. Take all those things and go through what you did. See what you learned and then incorporate it into your work. Your work will take a turn every single time. You'll jump ahead in your knowledge and proficiency."

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## *The Difference Abroad*

With so much of her time spent in Europe, I wondered what Delehanty considered the biggest differences between European watercolor artists and American watercolor artists. "Europeans take the medium very seriously," she says. "When you walk into any gallery in Paris, London or Barcelona, you're as likely to find watercolors as you are oils on canvas, especially in galleries that focus on representational art. You'll find that the prices are very similar, too. The level of appreciation for the medium is stronger there.

Turn for a demo

## *Meet the Artist*



**Sandy Delehanty (sandydelehanty.com) earned her bachelor of arts degree and a secondary teaching credential from California State University, Chico. She continued her education by traveling through Europe visiting art museums and selling original works of art to tourists. She has taught watercolor workshops in the United States and abroad. She's a signature member of**

**the American Watercolor Society and serves on the board of directors of American Women Artists. She's currently represented by Sparrow Gallery, in Sacramento, Calif., and Art Obsessions Gallery, in Truckee, Calif.**

# A Poured Painting

The technique of pouring watercolors gives a painting a unique look that features glowing transparent colors.

I create entire paintings by masking and pouring successive transparent layers of color with little or no direct brush painting. Most artists use pouring to create perfectly smooth washes for skies, sunsets and backgrounds and then complete their paintings using traditional watercolor techniques. Either way, this is a fun technique to add to your toolkit. Based on my own trial and error, here's my technique for pouring watercolor—as well as a step-by-step demo.

- **Tape** the edges of stretched Arches 140-lb. rough or cold-pressed paper with masking tape. Apply masking fluid to seal the tape to the paper.
- **Draw** a detailed picture with an HB mechanical pencil.
- **Mask** the shapes you want to be white first. Later, you'll mask the next lightest shapes, followed by the next lightest, and so on. Let the mask dry thoroughly each time, but don't use a hair dryer.
- **Mix** each color in its own cup. Squirt a dime-sized blob of paint from the tube into the cup. Add approximately one teaspoon of water and mix thoroughly. Slowly add water to fill the cup as if you were making a roux.
- **Test** colors on a wet piece of scrap Arches watercolor paper. Allow them to dry to observe their true values.
- **Wet** the entire paper with water.
- **Pour** up to three colors simultaneously and tip the paper to direct the movement. Note: Too much color mixing will result in a neutral color.
- **Watch** paint dry, catching drips and sopping up puddles by touching a dry edge of a tissue into the wet paint and holding it until the excess color wicks into the tissue.
- **Dry** at least four hours. The surface shouldn't feel cold to the touch.
- **Repeat** the same steps to create more layers. Don't remove your previous mask. Instead, mask the shapes that are one value darker than the first layer. Keep repeating this sequence of steps, always adding more mask until you reach the darkest values desired.
- **Peel** all the mask off. Finish with direct brushstrokes where needed.

**Want to learn more?** I recommend Jean Grastorf's workshops and her book, *Pouring Light* (North Light Books, 2009). Also, check out Linda Baker's instructional YouTube videos.



## Step 1

I set up the pouring station by placing two plastic cups upside down in a plastic tub to create support for the lower edge of the painting. The upper edge will rest on the opposite side of the tub.



## Step 2

Next, I prepared the paper by taping the edges. Then I made a detailed drawing. After masking the white shapes, I poured phthalo blue (green shade) over the ocean. When that layer was dry, I masked the lighter blue shapes and poured another layer of the same blue.



### Step 3

Once the ocean pours were completed, I masked right over the color of the water to protect it while I poured the rock colors.



### Step 4

The rocks required several pours to complete. I began by spattering masking fluid to create texture. After that had dried, I poured a very light layer of Hansa yellow medium, quinacridone red and phthalo blue (red shade). After the paper dried, I masked the light value surfaces of the rocks. When they dried, I poured a slightly darker value of the three colors. I repeated this process several times, working from the lightest value rock shapes to the darkest, eliminating the yellow at some point. For the final darkest darks, I mixed a brew of all three colors and indigo in one cup and poured.

### Step 5

I removed the masking, which peels off easily. I then added details to the water, painting directly with a brush.

## Toolkit

### PAPER

- Arches 140-lb. rough or cold-pressed, 2 inches wider on all four sides than the image

### PAINT

- Daniel Smith: Hansa yellow medium, quinacridone red, phthalo blue (green shade), phthalo blue (red shade), indigo

### BRUSHES

- 2-inch flat, sizes 4, 6 and 8 round

### POURING MATERIALS

- large sink or plastic tub, clear plastic cups for paint mixing, pipettes, tissues, spray bottle, water container

### MISCELLANEOUS

- Gator Board (or similar), Incredible White Mask Liquid Frisket, stapler and staples, masking tape, mechanical pencil with HB lead, kneaded eraser, scraps of Arches 140-lb. rough or cold-pressed paper



## Final

**17 Mile Drive View** (watercolor on paper, 18x24) is based on a reference photo I took along the famous Seventeen Mile Drive in Monterey County near Carmel, Calif. The painting will be exhibited in Sparrow Gallery, in Sacramento, Calif. **WA**