

LOCAL ARTIST ANGIE KILCULLEN AND *Barn Again HOME*

BY MICHELLE BLANCHARD ARDILLO

BARN AGAIN HOME was born of the same spontaneous spirit that embodies most of Angie Kilcullen's art: Take something old and make it new again. Kilcullen's art studio and workshop is housed in the 115-year-old barn located in the backyard of her Victorian home, near Antiques Row in Old Town Kensington, MD. A busy wife and mother of four, Kilcullen spends as much time as possible in her converted barn studio, renovating flea market finds into shabby chic furniture pieces and decorative accessories, prepping for art classes or paint night parties, or working on her own art.

Kilcullen hails from Rayne, LA, a small city in southwest Louisiana Cajun country, which, ironically, boasts the nickname "Louisiana City of Murals." Kilcullen's mother noticed a unique perspective in her drawings, as early as first grade, where her drawing for Parents' Night was so different from the rest of her class. She enrolled soon after in private art lessons, which continued on into high school. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in art painting from nearby McNeese State University and got a master's degree in mixed media art from University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Her art professors saw authenticity in her work, which began to center on social justice issues rooted in her Catholic faith. She painted homeless men she saw on the streets of Lincoln, but all of her work seemed dreary and gloomy.

One professor, while observing her work in the studio, saw a rose in a glass on a windowsill and told Kilcullen that the rose represented what was missing from her work: hope. With that inspiration, her paintings took on new life.



Photo provided

After her first trip to Europe in the summer of 1988, she became enamored with the opulence in churches, specifically the many different textures she was experiencing in the countries she visited. Upon her return home, she began creating monstrances, religious vessels in the shape of a sunburst atop a cross, used for holding the consecrated host for Adoration. Kilcullen's monstrances were painted on wood and then embellished with old photos, shards of broken glass, plastic flowers — anything to glorify the existence of everyday people she encountered.

In hopes of avoiding the 9-to-5 lifestyle so that she would have time to work on her art, Kilcullen eventually found a full-time job as a flight attendant in Washington, D.C. This allowed her the flexibility she needed. She painted on her days off from flying, entered into some juried exhibitions to get her work out there, and sold enough of her pieces to gain self-confidence.

Her eventual marriage to an attorney and businessman moved her to Japan and then to Paris until 2002. Living in Tokyo provided her the opportunity to travel extensively.



BARN AGAIN HOME

Owner: Artist Angie Kilcullen

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Email: amk@barnagainhome.com

Website: barnagainhome.com

Paint Night Parties are \$30 per person, depending on age of participants, difficulty of project and length of party. Participants are welcome to bring refreshments to enjoy during the party.

Photo courtesy of Julia Kennedy Photography

Kilcullen said, "I was always absorbing art, in the way the Japanese prune their trees, the way they celebrate everything with great attention to detail." Life in Paris was a "visual feast," again providing lots of travel and a lot of museums to visit.

Being a stay-at-home mom didn't allow much time to create art, but she fed her passion through her children, creating jewelry and decorations for the home with her two daughters. As they grew older, she created Camp Yaya (which in Cajun Louisiana means "little ones"), a summer art camp for neighborhood girls. Now in its eighth year, both boys and girls come together to create art using almost entirely recycled materials, a nod to her own mixed media art.

In 2004, Kilcullen became one of the co-founders of Holy Redeemer Catholic School's annual arts festival in Kensington, MD, where regular classes are halted for a few days so that students can focus on art and creativity. That first year she was amazed to find something awakened inside her, something that as she admits, "blew my mind at the time." She shared, "We would dump a bunch of doodads, baubles, and beads on a table, and 45 minutes later, these kids had created masterpieces." She began to "noodle" on how she could make art — both her own and teaching it — more of a focus in her life.

After years of discussing it back and forth with her husband, searching for studio space affordable enough to rent, they began to discuss converting their barn, which was only being used for storage, into her studio. He finally looked at her one day and said, "What are you waiting for?" That was three years ago, when Barn Again HOME became a reality.

Kilcullen shared that while her husband is her biggest fan and supporter, they are completely different in every way, but they complement each other. When asked if he "gets" her work, she laughed and said, "No, but he always says he loves it!"

Barn Again HOME gives Kilcullen everything she had been yearning for — her own private art space separate from her family home, but close enough to pop in and out as needed while chauffeuring her sons to sports practices and school events. It is also a place for her college-age daughters to hold their summer camp. It is a place where she can socialize with friends, family and people in her community, helping them to create art of their own in a relaxing and warm environment. She uses her studio to support important causes and charities, something instilled in her by her parents. Her current work is focusing on a series entitled "Innocents." It features children in crisis, inspired by "everything from Syrian refugees to children living far below the poverty line in the U.S., to children who are victims of neglect and abuse throughout the world."

At her very popular paint night classes, she said, "Everyone is very nervous when they first come in, but then a calm settles in as they begin. The process of putting paint on the canvas relaxes everyone, regardless of their skill level or talent." Her laid-back approach and small class size of 10-12 provides time for a lot of individual attention, which also adds to the "I can do this" mindset of her patrons. She approaches each person individually, crouching down at their side, ready to mix paints, suggest colors, or even model brush strokes. Kilcullen takes photos throughout each paint night class as well as a photo of each artist with his or her completed work. She posts them on her website



Photo courtesy of Julia Kennedy Photography

and Facebook page, mixing promotion with the building of a community of friends and customers coming together for an evening of creating art.

Kilcullen confides, “One of my favorite things about my art classes goes back to my Louisiana upbringing, which is bringing people together and creating a sense of community. I’ve seen beautiful friendships develop from these classes and old friendships rekindled. I’ve hosted everything from birthday parties for 5-year-olds to birthday parties for 70-year-olds. I’ve had Brownie troops come in to earn a badge, and we’ve celebrated cancer survivors in the barn as well! My second favorite thing about teaching these classes is seeing someone go from being incredibly intimidated and nervous at the beginning of class to someone relaxed and joyful toward the end, someone possessing self-confidence and pride (and often surprise) in their work. I feel like the classes empower the participants and often stoke a new (or old) passion for painting and creativity.”

Michelle Blanchard Ardillo, a Louisiana native, is a freelance writer who teaches middle school English and literature at St. Jude Regional Catholic School. Her essay, “You CAN Handle the Truth” was published in an anthology of ultra-short memoirs called “Reflections.” She is currently working on a novel about a missing suitcase as well as a collection of autobiographical essays. Read more of her work at michelleardillo.com, or follow her on Goodreads and Twitter @michardillo.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

I attended my first-ever paint night on Thursday, March 2, 2017, at Angie Kilcullen’s Barn Again HOME studio. Walking from the street down a gravel path to the barn, I was struck by the image of Kilcullen standing in front of the all-glass door, in full teaching mode, already explaining the artwork we were to replicate: a pop art sketch of Pope Francis.

The room was very organized, well-lit and well set-up. There was a workstation for each patron, spread out along both sides of a long worktable with mismatched painted chairs. We each had a canvas on a table top easel, brushes in varying sizes, a Mason jar of water, a paper plate for our paint palette and a photo of the original artwork in a plastic sheet protector. Kilcullen consulted with each of us individually to select paints and squirt them onto our paper plates.

After preliminary instructions and helpful hints, she turned on music from her iPad, starting with Shawn Mendes and then moving on to country music. The music mixed with Kilcullen’s laid-back artist nature, as she walked in the room in leggings, a tunic and paint-spattered TOMS. She called out in her slight southern accent praise and support from time to time, which added to a very relaxing evening where I actually felt like I was making art.

The class was scheduled for 7-9:30 p.m., but Kilcullen allowed us to stay later to finish. I left with my pop art Papa Francisco very relaxed and thrilled with my work! I highly recommend trying out paint night at Barn Again HOME. — Michelle Blanchard Ardillo