**For Immediate Release**

**Florida CraftArt**501 Central Ave., St. Petersburg, FL 33701

727-821-7391 FloridaCraftArt.org

Contact: Katie Deits, Executive Director

**Florida CraftArt presents:**

***The Artists of ArtLofts***

January 7-18, 2020

*19 artists from ArtLofts will present their work in Florida CraftArt's exhibition gallery*

Florida CraftArt will present *The Artists of ArtLofts* in its exhibition gallery from January 7 to January 18. The 19 award-winning and emerging artists will present recent artwork which includes drawings, encaustic, glass, jewelry, mixed media, painting, photography and sculpture.

ArtLofts is on the second floor of Florida CraftArt and has working artists’ studios. The studios are usually open for the Saturday ArtWalks or by appointment. This exhibition will give the public an opportunity to see the artists’ work and to meet them in person at the reception on Friday, January 10 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Artists in the exhibition are Javier Dones, Julie Dye, Mavis Gibson, Susan Hess, Brian James, Gilbert Johnson, Beth Kauffman, Betsy Orbe Lester, Carol O’Bryon, Kirk Palmer, Karen Porter, Amanda Pratt, Rebecca Skelton, Brandy Stark, Kas Turner, Joe Walles, Lee West, Rick Whalen and Donna Winchester.

“We are excited to display the art of the talented artists of ArtLofts,” says Katie Deits, the Executive Director of Florida CraftArt. “They have such a profound level of experience and a diversity of styles. Several of the artists teach at colleges and universities, and have undoubtedly influenced many artists in Florida. While Florida CraftArt is based on fine craft, we support fine art with these artists’ studios and exhibits. Of course, the line between fine art and fine craft is getting more and more blurred in the art world. This is an opportunity for people to explore a variety of mediums by top-quality artists.”

Florida CraftArt is located at 501 Central Avenue in St. Petersburg. For more information, visit [www.FloridaCraftArt.org](http://www.FloridaCraftArt.org) or call (727) 821-7391. Admission is free. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

Florida CraftArt is a nonprofit organization founded in 1951 and headquartered in St. Petersburg. Its mission is to grow the statewide creative economy by engaging the community and advancing Florida’s fine craft artists and their work. Fine craft art is presented in its 2,000-square-foot retail gallery and a large gallery features curated exhibitions. Florida CraftArt is the *only* statewide organization offering artists a platform to show and sell their work.

**CUTLINES (More images of work available on request. Photo and video opportunities available.)**Headshots of artist whose work is attached.

**Beth Kauffman Fishy-Fishy,jpg**

ArtLoft Artist Beth Kauffman created this glow-in-the dark painting of an imaginative fish.

**Javier Dones -Copper Magic.jpg**

Javier Dones uses artful chemistry techniques in his abstract works.

**Julie Dye BlossomAndShine-Necklace.jpg**

Julie Dye is a jewelry artist and metal smith who creates minimalistic, elegant designs from silver, gold and specialty papers.

**Karen Porter Wild Gray.jpg**

“Wild Gray,” a painting by Karen Porter, is full of energy and spirit.

**Lee West-Bird of Paradise**

**Lee West uses delicate blending of collage and acrylic paint to depict the early morning light in this painting of a bird of paradise.**

**BIOS OF THE ARTISTS OF ARTLOFTS:**

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST JAVIER T. DONES**

Javier T. Dones was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico in 1967. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1990 from the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico.

Since 1992, he has lived in Saint Petersburg and since 2005 has worked from his ArtLofts Studio 209.

“My native land is the tropical paradise of Puerto Rico,” he says. “The island is both exuberant in natural beauty and rich in culture. All elements feel intense, like loud voices. When it comes to the expression of the arts, I often execute my work with the same intensity and loudness.”

“The voices of nature are the ones that speak loudest to me. Especially the hidden icons of sacrosanct spontaneity. The perfect designs that would elude the usual attention. My current work springs from that lifelong fascination for the natural elements.”

He says, “My vehicles are chemistry processes and techniques as developed by the Master of the Arts, Jack Lebowitz.”

Mr. Dones mainly works in copper, but also uses other metals, natural pigments and enamels incorporated in the pieces. He uses a fumed copper technique, powdered metals and enamels. The coloration is the actual copper patina, elicited by his unique chemical process.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST JULIE DYE**

Julie Dye loves working with her hands! She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from the Ringling College of Art in Design in 2004. During her time there she developed a deep interest in bookbinding and working with paper.

Julie launched her business, Blossom and Shine in 2009 and began selling hand-bound journals, decorative home décor items and unique paper jewelry. Julie continued to innovate her passion for blended material jewelry by learning the art of metal-smithing and shifting her focus to combining metal, Japanese paper and resin to create a line of modern jewelry capable of making a statement and layering.

Visit www.blossomandshine.com

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST MAVIS GIBSON**  
Mavis Gibson was born in Saskatchewan, Canada. She began painting in 2009 after spending time working with a gifted artist in the south of France.

Afterwards in 2010, she studied at L’Ecole des Beaux-arts in Paris. The texture of Paris with its intrinsic romance with the arts, its history, sensuality, architecture and its light continues to exert its influence on her work.

Returning to Florida, she continued working in oils and acrylics and considers herself both an abstract and figurative painter. Although her paintings often include recognizable imagery, it is not her intent to create documentary work. Mavis’ interest is in creating works that convey emotion, suggest a contemplative state, or elicit an alternative sense of being.

To see more of Mavis, visit her studio in ArtLofts 215 or [www.mavisgibson.com.](http://www.mavisgibson.com/)

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST SUE HESS**  
People wonder what inspires someone to become an artist? Considered a “creative colorist” Susan Hess’ work reveals immediately it is her passion for color. Her bold use of vibrant colors and fluid strokes creates energy in each painting.

Born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, Susan became fascinated with colors at the age of nine when she created her own colors by melting together crayons from “the big box” of Crayolas. She attended Maywood College and graduated with a bachelor’s in fine arts and interior design.

Working for 25 years as an interior designer, she continued her fascination with color through her use of paint and fabrics. She developed her artistic skills studying with national and international artists.

A resident of Madeira Beach, Florida, for more than 20 years, she creates interpretive impressions of people, places and nature. Her experimentation with acrylic, watercolor and collage led to a fascination of encaustic wax painting. her new encaustic work combines the spontaneity of color, the texture of acrylics and the flow of watercolors. She is currently working on her Linear Series which combines the interaction of color, line and surface.

Susan paints and exhibits her work at ArtLofts Studios in St. Petersburg, Florida. Her work has been included in numerous regional and national exhibits. She is a signature member of the Florida Watercolor Society and the International Society of Acrylic Painters.

“My artistic journey is always full of surprising challenges and my goal is to convey that excitement through color, design and texture.”  
She is in ArtLofts Studio 211. Visit [www.susanhessartist.com](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.susanhessartist.com%2F&h=ATPnFTqBqM4C0R1xQCHvIpvYg057gFfKSn3vSMlvTaVNUjTCohFwHCH67oZ_CxXNXf1IADRGQO9V5dWLj5VUMRRrSSsEKkryLMyIhCRfTyk9nyw9bvU1-RK6JVuqHjrHKhSnLuXcZ8qRYbkrP1Gs3bXMsF29Pi_8MhqPBWvfx87VxTB16KyxekllkFtW4R1JAHEkJWNhhLeyySBZ-5g_jGMtIxNBG734o9es5ob5dyLhiMpOAjb9ZQG3rEnCMKLbmadhBwDtRcmEgykABIziOT3co4MkvW1u)

**MEET ARTLOFTS PHOTOGRAPHER BRIAN JAMES**

Brian James is an American fashion advertising photographer. Born and raised in the Sunshine State, he takes pride in his community, and the people that make St. Petersburg a great place to live. In his work, Mr. James listens to his photography clients and recognizes the essence of their intended message. Visit BrianJamesGallery.com or ArtLofts Studio 210A.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST BETH KAUFFMAN**

Beth Kauffman is a stained-glass artist and painter located in St. Petersburg, Florida. She has worked with stained-glass and fused-glass for nearly thirty years and has published four stained-glass pattern books. From brightly painted jellyfish and groupers, to free-form stained-glass mermaids, Kauffman’s pieces are often a reflection of her coastal and nautical surroundings.

Kauffman also has a passion for history, which inspired her Legend series, a line of glass panels created with reclaimed, broken glass that tell the stories of local historical spots in Florida. Her recent Legends works include the St. Pete Pier, Snell Arcade, Tampa Union Station, as well as her piece currently on display, St. Petersburg’s Central Avenue in her ArtLofts Studio 234.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST BETSY ORBE LESTER**   
“Artists often embed meaning in the media to lock in their reality. Trouble is, the real is not always the obvious. For example, I work the theme of carnival—idiosyncratic, surreal, transformative—complete here with matching metaphor: fashion. For isn’t fashion the ultimate disguise, with its accompanying masks celebrating toil and play?”

An award-winning mixed media artist, Betsy Orbe Lester teaches where she learned, both at Eckerd College (Bachelor of Arts) and University of South Florida (Master of Fine Arts).

Her artwork is in these permanent collections: Tampa Museum of Art, Gulf Coast Museum, Neiman Marcus and private collections. Recent exhibitions include Denis Bibro Fine Art, New York City; Brevard Art Museum; Boca Raton Museum; and Tampa Museum of Art. Solo shows include: Merrick Gallery and The Morean Arts Center.

Betsy was the recipient of Pinellas County Arts Council Artist Resource Fund in 1999 and 2004). She was 1996 Pinellas Artist in Residence. She has been featured on Kid’s Place as the “Art Lady” on Vision Cable TV and was a former Delta flight attendant. Betsy resides in Treasure Island, Florida. Her studio is ArtLofts 201.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST CAROL O’BRYON**  
Carol has transitioned from a career as an interior designer to become a working artist. Her art reflects the same visual language as her designs – an interplay of space, color, texture and light. After moving to Florida in 1997, Ms. O’Bryon found the best of all possible worlds – water, light and abundant nature. These have marked her oil paints, as well as her glass art.

Fused glass is a recent passion for Carol. She affectively uses the colors, textures and light reflections of glass to create unusual, 3-dimensional, abstract pieces. While abstraction is often used in painting, it is seldom found in fused-glass work. She is in ArtLofts Studio 206.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST KIRK PALMER**

Descended from a line of vaudevillians, silent film actors, musicians, misfits and adventurers, Kirk Palmer is an artist who lives in Saint Petersburg, Florida. As a child, he followed his restless family from California to South America and then took a circuitous route to the Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina.

Kirk later served more than twenty years in the Marines, including a tour as a Middle East Foreign Area Officer and Arabic linguist at the American Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, before deciding to pursue the creative life more fully. Kirk studied visual arts at Eckerd College and received his Master’s of Fine Arts in Studio Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland.

His art practice centers on reclaiming a sense of static space in the face of the compelling and spectacular nature of contemporary information consumption.

He is in ArtLofts Studio 233.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST KAREN PORTER**

As native Floridian and lifelong resident of St. Petersburg, Karen Porter takes her artistic cues from the vibe of the community art culture and the art lovers she encounters daily. She is right at home in her downtown art studio above Florida CraftArt, where she receives a constant flow of inspiration from her surroundings.

Her large wall art canvases reflect the mural driven art that thrives in the city art scene. Ms. Porter holds a degree in Fine Art with an emphasis in painting and design. She has been teaching art for more than 15 years, in between raising her own two boys. Ms. Porter has also combined her passion for teaching art with her skills and talents in painting to become a working artist in her downtown studio.

She has just received her fourth commission to paint an outdoor mural in the cities of St. Petersburg and Tampa.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST AMANDA PRATT**

Amanda Pratt is best known for her Florida Themed Mixed Media Fluid Art highlighting the vibrant colors known to Florida's beach communities. Her work utilizes resin, inks, pigments, found objects, etc. Interactive elements allow her viewers to become a part of many of her creations.

Setting herself apart, Amanda plans, draws and hand cuts pieces of her art to create intricate collages. Her resin work is heavily inspired by natural elements. From the North, The lure of ocean views and salty air pulled her to St. Petersburg, Florida, where she now resides and continues to be inspired.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST REBECCA SKELTON**

Rebecca Skelton has exhibited her work since 1974 in juried shows such as Strange Figurations, Limner Gallery, Hudson, NY; Provincetown Art Association Works on Paper; All Florida Biennial at the Polk Museum of Fine Art; Brave Destiny at Williamsburg Art and Historical Center in Brooklyn, NY; Transparency/Project Creo in St. Petersburg; and the World Festival of Art on Paper in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has had solo shows and participated in group invitationals throughout Florida, most recently the traveling exhibit, Exquisite Corpse International at the Museum of Fine Arts and Chihuly Museum in St. Petersburg.

Ms. Skelton is represented internationally in private collections and the permanent collection of University of Tampa, Auburn University, The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, the collection of the State of Florida in Tallahassee and the Chelsea Hotel. Her work is included in A Body of Work; Tampa Bay Artists Interpret the Figure, published by The Arts Center in St. Petersburg, Florida; Tampa Review, literary journal, published by University of Tampa, and Florida Humanities published by Eckerd College. She received a Pinellas County Artist Resource Fund Grant, and a series of drawings was funded by Kickstarter. She has won Best in Show in the Florida Artists Group’s exhibition at the Boca Raton Museum of Art and Award of Excellence in a Morean Arts Center members show.

Her education includes a Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master’s of Fine Arts from Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, where she pursued the study of painting, drawing and printmaking. She has continued her studies in various areas of art, including jewelry classes to refine her sculpture techniques. She has participated in The New York Studio School’s Drawing Marathon in 2000 and 2004.

As an adjunct professor of art, Ms. Skelton has taught for University of Tampa, St. Petersburg College, USF St. Petersburg, HCC Ybor and Eckerd College. She also has taught a diverse set of students, such as developmentally-disabled adults, children, teenagers and senior citizens through The Morean Arts Center, Creative Clay, Youth Arts Corps and the Dali Museum. She is in ArtLofts Studio 208.  
Visit [www.RebeccaSkelton.com](http://www.rebeccaskelton.com/)

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST BRANDY STARK**

Brandy Stark moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1992.

As an undergraduate, she took a course in sculpture at the University of Tampa where she discovered her wire wrapping abilities. Utilizing welding rods, she made three wrapped wire figures: a triton, a dragon, and a centaur. These constituted the first generation of her “Metal Myths” series, established in 1995.

A lifelong lover of world mythology, her works often manifest as ancient characters, legends, and deities. Tying past to present, Stark sees herself as a Neo-expressionist with the weaving and wrapping process she uses transferring her own energy into the piece.

Inspired by the sculptures of Joan Miro, she also utilizes found objects in her pieces. These promote an awareness not only of upcycling but symbolize that everything and everyone has a place in this world. ​

Her photography focuses largely on moments of quiet contemplation. She utilizes size and color to encourage both the importance of a single moment of time, and the majestic nature of stillness.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST KAS TURNER**  
Kas Turner is a long-time professional artist who lives in St. Pete Beach. Her work has been included in numerous regional, national and international juried shows and exhibitions. Kas paints colorful contemporary interpretations of Florida coastal life with acrylics and exhibits her work in her ArtLofts at Florida CraftArt Studio 232 located in downtown St. Petersburg, Florida, at 5th St. and Central Avenue.

In 2011 she exhibited at the Hyde Park Village 22nd Annual Art Fair in Tampa and the St Armand’s Circle 23rd Annual Art Festival in Sarasota, Florida. Kas is a signature member of the International Society of Acrylic Painters, ArtX5 and the Professional Association of Visual Artists.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST JOE WALLES**

Joseph N. Walles studied business administration, education, liberal arts and sociology at the University of Toledo from 1966 to 1971. He began shooting for Toledo area newspapers while still in high school. In Florida, he was a photographer for the Clearwater Sun from 1972 until 1980, when he began as a photographer for the St. Petersburg Times. He was a picture editor there from 1995 until 2011.

He continues to be a photographer for his own creative satisfaction. Mr. Walles has exhibited his award-winning work since 1979, including solo shows at Florida Gulf Coast Arts Center and the Arts Center in St. Petersburg. Besides his career as a photojournalist, his work has been published in calendars, books and record jackets. His work is in numerous private collections and the American Securities Insurance Corporate Collection of American Photographers. He is in ArtLofts Studio 208.

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST LEE WEST**  
Lee West was attracted to the arts as a small child. She nurtured those interests at the University of Colorado and The Art Students League in New York City. In New York, she studied under Dagmar, then lead illustrator for ‘Vogue’ magazine.

Ms. West moved to Florida in 1971, after her stint in NYC as a fashion illustrator, and was immediately inspired by the flora and fauna of the South. Paintings of flowers and landscapes are painted in her studio from onsite sketches and photos.

She designed ‘Sea Life’ stained-glass transoms for the City of St. Petersburg Bay Vista Adult Recreation Building. In 2010, the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Convention and Visitors Bureau, along with Florida Craftsman, asked Lee to make Winter the dolphin as an 11½- inch stained glass ornament which they mailed to the White House to hang on the Blue Room Christmas tree.

She is a past president of the Pinellas Park Art Society, creator of awards for ‘Pride in the Park’ and ‘Music Without A Net,’ and was co-owner of the Midnight Pickle Art Gallery in old Palm Harbor.

Ms. West shows at Florida CraftArt, J.J. Watts Gallery; she participated in Art in Bloom at the Fine Arts Museum in St. Petersburg and was in the 5x5 show at the Tampa Museum of Art. She is currently a member of Artx5 (a group five artists) exhibiting throughout the State of Florida.  
Lee West's studio is in ArtLofts Studio 212. See more of her work at [www.leewestartist.com.](http://www.leewestartist.com.)

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST RICK WHALEN**Rick Whalen was young when he began his art studies with his mother, Mary Stanley Whalen, a well-known Niagara Falls painter who attended the University of Buffalo, graduated with a degree in Fine Arts, and continued studies at Albright Knox. The family lived in Montreal, Buenos Aires, Rouen and Baghdad before settling in St. Petersburg in 1956.

After years of working in oil with RR Robinson in his beach studio, Whalen began to experiment with watercolors and fell in love with the transparency of the medium. He began plein air painting with Jan MacFarlane in 1990 and continued studying with Bryan Ateyo, Tom Lynch, Tom Jones, Frank Webb, Don Getz, and continues with Taylor Ikin on Yupo paper, acrylic painting using palette knife and bright colors.

Rick says, “I am fascinated with the colors of Key West’s pastels, and the cheerful Caribbean palette of bright and vibrant colors.”

Much of Rick’s art incorporates this colorful palette today. He is a juror on occasion, and generally likes the congeniality of fellow artists. In 2009 he took first and second prizes at The Beach Art Center on Indian Rocks in two of their summer shows. His art can be found all along the eastern seaboard. In 2013, he painted the poster for The Clearwater Jazz Holiday. Much of his art is created as private commissions.

Visit Rick in his ArtLofts Studio 207 or [www.RickWhalen.com.](http://www.rickwhalen.com/)

**MEET ARTLOFTS ARTIST DONNA WINCHESTER**

The thread that connects my career evolution over four decades from graphic designer to newspaper reporter to communications strategist has been the desire to *gather and share information using images, words and mediums. A similar desire has informed my creative exploration as I’ve experimented with watercolor, photography and printmaking.*

*My current fascination is fiber art and the ability of textiles to serve as a source of narrative. I’m inspired by the feel, smell and aura of fibers – sumptuous velvets, decadent brocades*, shimmering organdies – and their ability to communicate emotion and meaning. Employing techniques such as reverse applique, rusting, shibori and hand- and machine-embroidery allows me to introduce intrigue and coax fibers to communicate color, texture and form.

While some of my pieces are purely decorative, I’ve become increasingly attracted to creating work that is both visually pleasing and utilitarian, such as tapestry bags embellished with beading and hand stitching. I’ve also begun experimenting with fabric manipulation techniques to create textural and dimensional surfaces, amplifying “voice” and furthering storytelling potential.