

OFF THE BEATEN PATH FLORIDA ARTS TOUR • A FREE, SELF-GUIDING TOUR THROUGH CENTRAL FLORIDA TO PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS' STUDIOS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Lake County • East Volusia County • West Volusia County

## *Annual Studio Tour, A Bridge Between Artist and Audience*

October 2017

### **Unveiling the Artist's World**

#### **Off the Beaten Path Florida Arts Tour Illustrates the Process of Creation**

*By Gary McKechnie, Author, Travel Writer*

It was a simple, yet impactful, idea that became one of the most anticipated art events of the year: Invite lovers of art into the studios of the creators of art. Designed as a participatory experience, it would illustrate the artists' world by allowing guests to witness the creative process.

Now in its seventh year, the Central Florida's Off the Beaten Path Arts Tour has fulfilled the founders' vision. It is a premier cultural adventure that offers fine works for acquisition while providing educational and interactive experiences in unique and creative working environments. Art is as an expression of life, and granting visitors access to multiple studios gives them the privilege of watching art come to life. As the Historic Artists' Homes and Studios program puts it...

*"Art doesn't happen by chance. Artists generate ideas, but they need space and time to develop these ideas. For visual artists, it all comes together in the studio, the place where that spark of inspiration catches fire."*

### **A Bridge Between Artist and Audience**

In the not too distant past, the creative path of the artist remained a mystery to most. Aside from invitations offered to patrons, the thought of an artist welcoming a stranger into the studio was far from universal.

But when a discussion among Central Florida artists arrived at the universal truth that art is meant to create connections, conventional wisdom was transformed. They felt the deepest and most meaningful connections would be made if people could see how art was created, why it was created and, above all, where it was created.

It was an epiphany. In 2011, the inaugural Off the Beaten Path Arts Tour became an inspiring breakthrough in the relationship between artist and observer. Since then, the event has expanded in all dimensions, from the number of participating artists to the number of visiting guests to the geographic reach of the tour itself. From a handful of working studios, the Tour has grown to encompass Central Florida's most creative communities including Lake County, west Volusia County, and east Volusia County where artists are opening the doors of nearly 60 studios and workshops.

From that single weekend in 2011, the event has grown in duration. The 2017 Tour will take place December 2nd & 3rd in Lake County and, in 2018, tours in both east and west Volusia County take place February 10th & 11th and February 24th & 25th.

## Artists in Residence

In its initial years, some wondered if artists working outside urban art centers possessed the ability, let alone the talent, to create works of interest. It's quite likely that because these "off the beaten path" artists favored familiar, peaceful, and comfortable locations, they also enjoyed the freedom to fully explore their creativity. Indeed, few guests were aware that pieces by many of these talented artists, some who worked in studios located in mixed-use neighborhoods, residential outbuildings, recycled barns, and even alleyways, were already displayed in retail galleries, public spaces and, notably, in private collections across America.

Inspired by their surroundings and with few distractions to divert their attention, they were in their element. More precisely, they were in their elements because, just as every musician favors a particular instrument, every artist favors a particular medium. On the Tour, you will find painters working in oils, acrylics, and watercolors. Some artists express themselves through metals, jewelry, textiles, and pottery. Others prefer photography, printmaking, woodwork, clay, or mixed media.

The diverse range of styles is mirrored by an increasingly diverse audience; one that anxiously awaits the opportunity to discover new artists and new works of art.

## A Novel Approach to Art Appreciation

In the beginning, the Tour primarily attracted dedicated art enthusiasts along with weekenders intrigued by the novel idea of visiting an artist's studio. Soon the buzz began to spread far beyond those pioneering cultural travelers.

In each successive year, more artists were discovered and more people became dedicated visitors, patrons, and friends. Tourism and museum professionals, along with gallery owners, docents, and art curators, have become enthusiastic attendees. Serious collectors and those testing the waters of art as an investment are finding pieces that speak to them. Architects, builders, and developers have found this widespread display of creativity inspiring their own imaginations and enhancing their personal artistic palette. Daytrippers and weekend travelers from across Florida and out of state are following their hearts (and their tour maps) in a quest to discover art and the motivation behind it. Consulting the Tour's online and print guides, they'll find special exhibits held during Tour weekends at cultural institutions including Modernism Museum Mount Dora, Museum of Art DeLand, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, Mount Dora Center for the Arts, and the Lake Eustis Museum of Art. Many plan the event as a weekend journey of discovery, adding new adventures in dining, sightseeing, and entertainment as they travel off the beaten path.

From a blank canvas, the Central Florida's Off the Beaten Path Arts Tour has followed the journey of the works it represents. It is picture perfect.

For more information, visit [www.FloridaArtsTour.com](http://www.FloridaArtsTour.com)

—end—

The author of the best-selling Great American Motorcycle Tours, Gary McKechnie also wrote National Geographic's USA 101 and Ten Best of Everything: National Parks. He lectures on American travel and history aboard the ships of the Cunard, Seabourn, and Silversea lines. He is also the author of 'A Brief History of Mount Dora, Florida' co-written with his wife, Nancy Howell.



**December 2 & 3, 2017**  
Lake County  
[www.FloridaArtsTour.com](http://www.FloridaArtsTour.com)  
**Off The Beaten Path  
Florida Arts Tour**  
*a free, self-guiding tour through Central Florida to artists' studios and cultural institutions...*