

# NEWS FLORIDA ARTS TOUR.COM

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

Lake County • Seminole County • Greater DeLand Area

*“...treating patrons to the artistic equivalent  
of dining at the chef’s table.”*

*- Gary McKechnie, Visit Florida writer/National Geographic author*

## **Florida’s Artistic Treasure Hunt**

August 22, 2016

*By Gary McKechnie, Author, Travel Writer*

Art can be more than just an admirable object. When in search of an artist’s motivation, cultural adventurers may find themselves exploring the world. In New Mexico they seek the baked and brittle landscape that inspired Georgia O’Keeffe. In Provence, tours showcase farms and fields captured by Van Gogh in paintings of unimaginable beauty. In Maine, travelers explore the same rocky New England coastline that inspired generations of Wyeths.

But to truly understand an artist’s work, you must dig deeper. For while everyone is influenced by their surroundings, an artist will always return to a place where their creativity can flourish.

The studio.

Whether it is an attic, a barn, or a bedroom, the intimate nature of the studio offers the artist the freedom to create in a setting that provides both familiarity and inspiration.

Yet for art lovers, the studio has largely remained a mystery.

Until now.

## **Artists Committed to the Community**

To bridge the divide between artist and audience, in 2011 a federation of visual artists in Florida did something revolutionary: They welcomed cultural travelers into their studios. The event, created by artists whose works can be found in retail galleries, public spaces, and in private collections across America, was designed for those whose love of art runs deeper than an occasional outdoor festival.

In the years since, the Off the Beaten Path Florida Arts Tour has achieved three notable goals. First, it has educated the public on the importance of the professional working studio. Second, it has raised the profile of artists who were “hidden in plain sight” midway between the East Coast art capitals of Miami and Atlanta. Finally, for art collectors and weekend travelers from across the Southeast, the Tour has given ardent art lovers the thrill of discovering an impressive (and, frankly, overlooked) pool of talent.

Held on selected weekends in December and February, the event encompasses three tour areas near Orlando in neighboring Lake, Seminole, and western Volusia counties. Here, more than 60 artists who work in paintings, pottery, photography, woodwork, sculptures, metals, jewelry, textiles, and mixed media open 40 studios to the public. The experience is further enhanced through demonstrations as well as special exhibitions held at 20 cultural institutions such as the Mount Dora Center for the Arts, the Casselberry Art House, and DeLand’s Museum of Art.

## Looking Through the Artists' Eyes

By opening studios where the full extent of their creativity is realized, painters, sculptors, and photographers are, in essence, treating patrons to the artistic equivalent of dining at the chef's table. For many guests, it is a rare and highly anticipated privilege. A working studio, in this case found in mixed-use neighborhoods, residential outbuildings, work/living spaces, and even in alleyways, is often as unique and distinct as the artists themselves. No matter the setting, each art-filled studio reveals a far greater range of diversity than found in an ordinary retail venue.

It's worth noting that in the years since its inception, tour organizers and attendees have found that the event generates far more impressive returns than a simple retail transaction. Because the setting is personal to the artist and equally intriguing to the guest, casual meetings often lead to extended conversations and lasting relationships. From this, patrons develop a deeper understanding of the artistic process while artists gain deeper insight into the execution of commissioned pieces.

The Tour has also created a portal into Florida's 'off the beaten path' art scene. Working well outside the sphere of metropolitan studios, shops and galleries, these so-called 'unknown artists' are creating pieces on par with their high-profile colleagues. For collectors as well as casual buyers, access to their favorite artists often elicits a sense of discovery and further deepens the bonds between them.

"We've found our audience is largely comprised of those with a cultural passion," explains Doug Hays who, along with Kace Montgomery and Brenda Heim, is a co-founder of the Tour. "Whether the visitor is a casual art lover or a dedicated collector, they tend to have a passion for beauty, however they choose to define it. What we create as individual artists answers that individual need."

"Beyond that," continues Montgomery, "the visitors we've met also have a passion for travel, for discovery, and for life – which happen to fit in perfectly with what we've collectively created through the Off the Beaten Path Arts Tour."

Asked what the event means to each artist, to each visitor, and to her home state, Brenda Heim chooses her words with care.

"There are few places in America where an artist and an art lover can develop a personal relationship as well as a deeper understanding and appreciation of one another," she observes. "We're proud that we recognized cultural travelers were seeking something new -- a cultural adventure, so to speak."

"In a way, we're even more proud that right here in the heart of Florida -- in our own backyard – we brought together a federation of artists who share a common purpose and the vision to make their world accessible to art lovers."

### WHEN YOU GO

The Off the Beaten Path Arts Tour will be held in Lake and Seminole counties on December 3 & 4, 2016 and in the Greater DeLand area of western Volusia County in February 25 & 26, 2017. For more information, visit [www.floridaartstour.com](http://www.floridaartstour.com)



**Dec. 2016 | Feb. 2017**  
**Off The Beaten Path Florida Arts Tour**

*a free, self-guiding tour through Central Florida to artists' studios and cultural venues...*