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**Hermitage STARs Announced for 2019**

*Five outstanding Florida arts educators have been selected for a three-week residency, July 1-21, at the Hermitage Artist Retreat in Englewood. This year's recipients hail from Bradenton, Tampa, Naples, Hollywood, and Miami.*

(Sarasota County) In July, five Florida public school arts teachers will be spending three weeks in Sarasota County working on their own artistic endeavors. They’re the winners of the 2019 State Teacher/Artist Residency program (STARs), presented by the Hermitage Artist Retreat and the [Florida Alliance for Arts Education](http://faae.org/) (FAAE). This year's recipients include four visual artists and a composer. The five receive a three-week summer residency, July 1-21, at the Hermitage in Englewood, where they live and work as artists, without any expectation, schedule or demands.

“These outstanding educators are also artists,” says Bruce Rodgers, executive director of the Hermitage. “During the school year they have little time to pursue their own artistic work. The STAR program gives them the rare opportunity to experience an ambience where artists from around the world come to get motivated and connect with the artist within. When these teachers nourish their artistic selves, they return to the classroom rejuvenated and both students and teachers benefit.”

The chosen five are Cheryl Meehan, a visual arts teacher at Freedom Elementary in Bradenton; Robert Constable, a music composition teacher at Crestwood Elementary in Tampa; David Martin, a visual arts teacher at Bonita Springs Elementary in Naples; Julie Orsini-Shakher, a visual arts teacher at Dr. Michael Krop Senior High in Hollywood; and Mirena Suarez, a visual arts teacher at Ada Merritt K-8 Center in Miami.

Florida arts educators apply for the Hermitage summer residencies through FAAE. Applications are open to all Florida music, theatre, visual art and creative writing teachers. Since the start of the program in 2011, 43 teachers have represented 20 Florida counties. Residencies last for three weeks and culminate with a free community program on the Hermitage’s beachfront campus.

**Mirena Suarez** is a Cuban-born artist whose work reflects the reflects “the universal issues of identity, change, connections, and fragility. Through the use of a variety of media, I choose the medium according to the concept of the work and the expressive qualities of the materials.” Suarez uses digital photography, textiles, broken tile mosaic, and drawing. As part of this STAR residency program, she says she will start on a body of work for a solo art exhibit. “This residency will provide me with the precious time and the so-much-needed silence and solitude, to concentrate and focus, and to get inspired and come up with creative ideas. I also plan to collaborate with other fellow artists-teachers, and to enjoy nature and the beautiful landscape.”

**Robert Constable** has been composing art music for more than 40 years. His music has been performed all over the world and has received many awards. On a Fulbright Scholarship, Constable studied for two years with Gyorgy Ligeti in Hamburg, Germany. From 1995 to 2005, he was active as a director and participant of the infamous BONK Festival of New Music, which brought cutting-edge composers and performers from all over the world to the Tampa Bay area for performances. From 1997-2011, Constable led the avant-garde pop group, Handshake Squad, making “pop music for people who hate pop music.” He has taught at Crestwood Elementary for more than 12 years, during which he developed the guitar and recorder programs. Constable’s plans for his Hermitage residency include finishing a work for acapella chamber choir and starting a piece for two violins and piano. “I’ll also be working on a computer program for the creation of a multi-channel electro-acoustic composition,” he says. “My music and musical thoughts are often inspired by nature and natural events, so the Hermitage seems like the perfect place for me to work!”

**Cheryl Meehan** teaches art to about 720 children, grades K-5, at Freedom Elementary in Bradenton. Meehan concentrates on portraits and figures in her own art. “I love looking at and painting people. The longer I look at them the more beautiful they seem to become,” she says. Meehan says that she often uses photographs as a reference for her work but is looking forward to painting *en plein air* at the Hermitage. “I’m eager to paint on the beach with all the light and colors I’ll find there,” she says. “I’m also looking forward to shooting reference photos for future paintings.”

**David Martin** has been teaching K-5 art at Bonita Springs Elementary but will be teaching high school drawing classes next year. With a focus on figure and portraiture, Martin explores color, shape and texture throughout a variety of mediums. “For many years after the passing of my sister, my artwork focused on grief, death and loss,” says Martin. “My mindset is now changing. I now want to focus on color, shapes and textures with just a hint of ridiculousness. I want viewers to just enjoy the images and get lost in the details. Some people take art way too seriously—to a point where art becomes pretentious and thus ruins the experience.”

**Julie Orsini Shakher** has been teaching for 29 years in Miami Dade public schools. She is a figurative artist whose recent works are silverpoint drawings, made by dragging a silver rod or wire across a primed surface. “My goal is to make drawing more permanent and less fragile, and to bring an ancient form of drawing into the contemporary platform,” says Orsini Shakher. She adds that, during her residency, she intends to create a series called “Magical Forrest” of largescale silverpoint images created on gessoed board. She says the images will depict “couples and children lounging in a park-like setting. They will be surrounded by nature—the flora and fauna native to south Florida. I want the viewer to feel the warmth of this surreal environment and experience the quintessence of harmony between man and nature.”

“We look forward to seeing what this latest group of STARs will create,” says Rodgers. “It’s an honor to celebrate Florida’s top arts educators.”

**About the Hermitage Artist Retreat:**

The Hermitage is a nonprofit artist retreat located in Englewood, Sarasota County, Florida. It invites accomplished artists in all disciplines for residencies on its beachfront campus which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Its artists, who are asked to interact with the community, touch thousands of Gulf Coast residents and visitors with unique and inspiring programs. Hermitage fellows have included Pulitzer, Tony, Emmy, Grammy and MacArthur Fellowship award winners. The Hermitage awards the $30,000 Greenfield Prize for a new work of art, and the Aspen Music Festival awards the annual Hermitage Prize in Composition. For more information about The Hermitage Artist Retreat, visit www.HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

**The Hermitage is supported by:**

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