

## MEDIA CONTACT

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### **Hermitage 2021 STARs Announced!**

*Five exceptional Florida teaching artists were selected for a July residency at the Hermitage Artist Retreat. This year's recipients hail from Kissimmee, Gainesville, Cantonment, and Stuart. **These extraordinary educators and artists will present a hands-on, family-friendly showcase of their work on July 17 at the Hermitage.***

(June 3, 2021) Five Florida public school arts teachers will spend part of their summer on Manasota Key while working on their own artistic endeavors. They are the winners of the 2021 State Teachers Artist Residency program (STARs), presented by the Hermitage Artist Retreat and the Florida Alliance for Arts Education (FAAE). This year's recipients include three visual arts educators, a creative writing teacher, and one music instructor. The five receive a residency at the nationally renowned Hermitage Artist Retreat, where they can focus on their own work and craft as creative artists. **These five teaching artists will present a hands-on, family-friendly showcase of their work on Saturday, July 17, 11 a.m., at the Hermitage's Manasota Key campus, 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood. Additional details to be announced soon. To register for this program, visit [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org).**

“These exceptional educators are also talented artists and creative minds in their own right,” says Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO of the Hermitage. “During the academic year, their attention is devoted entirely to their students, and this past year has been particularly challenging for educators throughout our nation. The STARs program offers five distinguished teachers the opportunity to experience what leading artists from around the world have come to the Hermitage for – to focus on their craft, their art, and their creative process. Over the years, the STARs have created some truly stunning works of art, music, and literature during their time at the Hermitage. Many teaching artist alumni have shared that this program enables them to return to their students with a new fire and passion for arts education.”

The chosen five are **Megan Boehm**, a painting instructor at Kissimmee Middle School in Kissimmee; **Kimberley Mullins**, a creative writing instructor at Gainesville High School in Gainesville; **Jennifer Rodriguez**, a ceramics instructor at the J.M. Tate Senior High School in Cantonment; **Eric Troop**, a music instructor at the Bellalago Academy in Kissimmee; and **Laura Wiswell**, a painting instructor at the Port Salerno Elementary in Stuart.

Florida arts educators apply for the Hermitage summer residencies through FAAE. Applications are open to all Florida music, theater, visual art, and creative writing teachers. Since the start of the program in 2011, 53 teachers have represented 25 Florida counties. Residencies culminate with a free community program. For more information about the Hermitage STAR program and how to apply, Florida arts educators are encouraged to visit [www.faae.org](http://www.faae.org).

**Megan Boehm** is an artist and began her career in museum education before becoming a teacher in 2015. As an educator, Boehm focuses on helping students discover and explore their passion for the visual arts, through projects designed to honor and support the diversity of her students. She strives to give students unique, hands-on arts experiences and encourages open-ended exploration in the studio. She is a nominee for Osceola School's 2021 Arts Teacher of the Year awards. As a painter, Boehm's work centers around themes of history, reenactment, authenticity, and time travel. Her layered, faceted compositions, often rendered in oil paint on top of partially exposed charcoal underdrawings, featured refracted figures in mirrored, fractured spaces designed to invite the viewer to determine the real from the reflection.

**Kimberley Mullins** is retired from the Navy and has enjoyed reading and writing since her early childhood. Mullins has published a book of poetry and is a regular contributor with *Harness* magazine. Her first chapter of her forthcoming novel, *Iben...I've been been through some sh#@!* was published in *The Write Launch*, in February. In addition to writing poetry, Mullins has also participated at spoken word venues at the Urban Grind in Atlanta, GA; Busboys and Poets in Washington, D.C.; and the Thomas Center in Gainesville.

**Jennifer Rodriguez** became interested in art at an early age, as her mother taught her to draw and paint before she even entered school. As a native Floridian, Rodriguez has always felt deeply connected to the wildlife, land and waterways of her home, which informs much of her work. Rodriguez has worked in a variety of media, but most of her recent work has been in ceramics. She believes that the tactile process of working with clay itself creates a strong affinity with nature, as clay is derivative of

the earth's crust. She says she uses clay as a creative vehicle to explore biomorphic forms and their organic textures.

**Eric Troop** has been teaching middle school instrumental music at Bellalago Academy in Kissimmee Florida since 2007. His responsibilities include directing The Bellalago Academy Concert Band, Jazz Band, Beginning Band, and teaching Keyboard class. He also oversees extra-curricular band activities such as Drum Line and Pep Band. Under his direction, the instrumental groups at Bellalago perform several concerts a year. The Bellalago Academy Concert Band has been selected (through audition) to perform at the Walt Disney World resort the last six years. In 2010, Eric applied for and was awarded the Mr. Holland's Opus grant. He was awarded \$36,000 in new instruments for his band program. In addition, he was awarded the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation Teacher Award in 2011 where he received the award from Wynton Marsalis at the fame Carnegie Hall in New York City. In 2014, he was named Bellalago Academy's Teacher of the Year and was a top 10 finalists for Osceola School District's Teacher of the Year. Besides teaching music, Eric performs solo acoustic guitar/singing at local restaurants and pubs in Central Florida and composes/records his own music.

Born and raised in Colombia, **Laura Wiswell** frames her perspective through the lens of her immigration journey. Through the years, she has worked on themes ranging from identity, environmental stewardship, and place. Wiswell produces personal artwork, artwork and murals on commission, and enjoys creating projects in ceramics and sewing.

"We look forward to seeing what this latest group of STARs will create," says

Sandberg. “It is an honor to celebrate Florida’s leading arts educators, and we are grateful to the Florida Alliance for Arts Education for their continued collaboration.”

**About the Hermitage Artist Retreat:**

The Hermitage is a nonprofit artist retreat located in Manasota Key, Florida, inviting diverse and accomplished artists across multiple disciplines for residencies on its beachfront campus, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Hermitage artists are invited to interact with the local community, reaching thousands of Gulf Coast residents and visitors each year with unique and inspiring programs. Hermitage Fellows have included twelve Pulitzer Prize winners, Poets Laureate, MacArthur ‘Genius’ Fellows, and multiple Tony, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar winners and nominees. Works created at this beachside retreat by a diverse group of Hermitage alumni have gone on to renowned theaters, concert halls, and galleries throughout the world. Each year, the Hermitage awards the \$30,000 Hermitage 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 [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org).

**The Hermitage is supported by:**

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