

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Hermitage Media Relations; 941-475-2098, Ext. 8;
Communications@HermitageArtistRetreat.org



Hermitage 2023 STARs Announced!

Special Program Announced for July 14th in a partnership between Hermitage Artist Retreat and the Englewood YMCA

Five exceptional Florida teaching artists were selected for a July residency at the Hermitage Artist Retreat. This year's recipients hail from Brevard, Escambia, Orange, Palm Beach, and Seminole Counties.

These educators and artists recognized from across the State of Florida will present a family-friendly showcase of their work on Friday, July 14th at the Hermitage.

(June 7, 2023) 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 2023 State Teachers Artist Residency program (STARs) – now in its thirteenth year – presented by the **Hermitage Artist Retreat** in partnership with the **Florida Alliance for Arts Education** (FAAE). This year's recipients were selected from dozens of impressive applicants, and the five teachers selected from across the State of Florida include three visual arts educators working in different mediums, a music teacher and electronic musician, and an artist/educator working across disciplines to illustrate an original novel. The five receive a residency at the nationally renowned Hermitage Artist

Retreat, where they can focus on their own work as creative artists. **These five teaching artists will present a family-friendly showcase of their work on Friday, July 14th starting at 1pm. This special event will be held outdoors at the Hermitage's beachfront campus on Manasota Key; entrance at 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood, FL 34223.** The program is presented in partnership with the Englewood YMCA. In addition to the students and families attending from the YMCA, this Hermitage community program will be free and open to the public with a \$5/person registration fee. Due to capacity limitations and safety protocols, **registration is required at 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 has been a particularly challenging couple of years for educators throughout the State of Florida. 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, theater, dance, and literature during their time at the Hermitage. Many Hermitage 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 five recipients of this honor, selected among dozens of impressive applicants, include: **Jeffrey Brown**, a keyboard instructor at Dr. Phillips High School in Orlando (Orange County); **James Finch**, a visual arts instructor at West Shore Jr/Sr High School in Melbourne (Brevard County); **Katherine Gebhart**, an art instructor at Jerry Thomas Elementary School in Jupiter (Palm Beach County); **Omar Otero**, a photography and painting instructor at Hagerty High School in Oviedo (Seminole County); and **Rachael Pongetti**, a visual art instructor at the Escambia High School in Pensacola (Escambia County). *Full bios are included below.*

Since the start of the Hermitage STARs program in 2011, 62 teachers have represented over 30 Florida counties. These prestigious residencies culminate with a

free community program, this year hosted in partnership with the **Englewood YMCA**.

“We are looking forward to partnering with the Hermitage to offer this special opportunity to our YMCA community,” said **Gene T. Jones**, President & CEO of the **YMCA of Southwest Florida**. “The Hermitage inspires creative minds to achieve their greatest potential, and we’re excited to share this excellent summer program with our YMCA youth and families.”

The STARS program is one of the only Hermitage residency programs open to application; arts educators from schools throughout the State of Florida are eligible, including music, theater, visual art, dance, and creative writing teachers. For more information about the Hermitage STARS program and how to apply, Florida arts educators are encouraged to visit FAAE.org.

“We look forward to seeing what this newest class of Hermitage 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 partnership. We are also looking forward to this upcoming collaboration with our friends at the YMCA as we share the STARS talents with the members of our community and the next generation.”

For more information on the Hermitage and upcoming Hermitage programs, please visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

Full Program Description

“2023 Hermitage STARS,” Friday July 14th @ 1pm – The incredible talents of Florida’s arts educators reach well beyond the boundaries of the classroom. The STARS program, now in its thirteenth year, is designed to nourish and replenish the passionate artist within each of the remarkable teachers selected for the honor. This year, they represent multiple strands of visual art, writing, and music and come from all across the state of Florida. **Jeffrey Brown** (Music, Orange County), **James Finch** (Painting, Brevard County), **Omar Otero** (Photography and Painting, Seminole County), **Rachael Pongetti** (Visual Art, Escambia County), and **Katherine Gebhart** (Writing and Illustration, Palm Beach County) will have two weeks to create new work, culminating in a sharing with the community on Friday, July 14th on the Hermitage campus. **Family and student friendly**

program – all are welcome! This Hermitage community program is presented in partnership with the Englewood YMCA and is free and open to the public with a \$5/person registration fee. Due to capacity limitations and safety protocols, **registration is required at HermitageArtistRetreat.org**.

NEW LOCATION! Friday, June 16, 6:30pm, “The Radiant Tarot: Pathway to Creativity,” with Hermitage Fellow **Tony Barnstone**, at Bookstore1 in Downtown Sarasota

Tuesday, June 20, 6:30pm, “The Many Languages of Jennifer Croft,” with Hermitage Fellow **Jennifer Croft**, on the Hermitage Beach

Presented in partnership with Sarasota County Libraries and the Johann Fust Library Foundation

Friday, June 23, 7pm, “Songs from the Sand: A Hermitage Cabaret,” featuring the work of Hermitage Fellows and leading musical theater composers, performed by Sarasota artists, at Waterside Pavilion at Lakewood Ranch

Presented in partnership Lakewood Ranch Communities

Friday, July 14, TBD, “2023 Hermitage STARS” featuring the work and talent of the 2023 State Teaching Artist Residents

Presented in partnership with Florida Alliance for Arts Education and Englewood YMCA

Hermitage 2023 STARS Teaching Artist Bios

Jeff Brown teaches keyboard at Dr. Phillips High School in Orange County, FL, and serves as Math Interventionist at Chancery Charter HS. His degree is in Industrial Engineering from Northwestern University. He was senior consultant for Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) before working in music. As a musician, he has held music director, choir director and educator positions, including Teaching Artist in Residence at Santa Fe Opera. Awards include two Helene Wurlitzer Foundation residency grants, the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts Residency Award, Banff Centre IWJCM selection, National Hispanic Cultural Center/McCune Foundation Fellowship, and Florida Alliance for Arts Education (Arts Integration Guided Residency). His compositions and performances have been presented in Canada, Europe, South America, and the U.S. He teaches in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

James Finch graduated from the University of Central Florida with a BA degree in Art and specialized in Graphic Design. He has won two international design awards, multiple state awards, and numerous advertising (Addy) awards. Mr. Finch continues to work in the commercial art field as a designer and enjoys drawing and painting in his spare time. He currently teaches at West Shore Jr./Sr. High in the Computer Graphics programs. Many of his students have gone on to further their education and have careers in the arts ranging from animators, creative directors, motion graphic/social media arts, architecture, industrial designers, illustrators, and more. Mr. Finch was a member of the Space Coast Advertising Federation, FAEA and BAEA.

Katherine Gebhart is a life-long visual artist who also creates theater, writing, and poetry. For over 10 years, she has been teaching within the school district of Palm Beach County, where she encourages her students to be their best by striving for innovation and not perfection and to use their most imaginative ideas, incorporating both learned techniques and what makes them personally unique. When she is not in the studio, she is actively engaged in the culture of Jerry Thomas Elementary through many avenues, not the least of which is musical theater.

Omar Otero received his Bachelor of Arts in Photography and Digital Imaging from the Ringling College of Art and Design, one of the most highly recognized and innovative arts colleges in the United States. He has had the privilege to teach photography, sculpture, drawing, and painting nationally and in Central America. After graduating, Otero worked side by side with actors and crew in New York television, including the daytime dramas *All My Children*, *One Life to Live*, *Guiding Light*, and *As the World Turns*. He has won multiple national honors, including the Ava Video Award. He started his art teaching career as a visual arts instructor at IQ Village School of the Arts in Orlando, Florida. Following that, he started teaching in Tegucigalpa, Honduras during the school year and also at his alma mater, Ringling College of Art and Design, during the summer.

Rachael Pongetti is a Pensacola-based teacher, photographer, and multimedia artist who focuses on the visual culture of her surrounding community and the theme of impermanence. She is the author of *Uncovering the Layers*, *The Pensacola Graffiti Bridge Project*, and recipient of the National Book Award for Communication for Freedom of Speech, from the Freedom Foundation in Valley Forge. Her work has appeared in various publications, exhibitions, and private collections. After facing the challenges of teaching through the pandemic, Rachael has turned to more analog-based art forms such as mixed media, collage, and assemblage art.

The Hermitage Artist Retreat

Sarasota County, Florida

Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO

The Hermitage is a non-profit artist retreat located in Manasota Key, Florida, inviting 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 15 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, the newly announced \$35,000 Hermitage Major Theater Award for an original theater commission, and the Aspen Music Festival's Hermitage Prize in Composition.

For more information, visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

The Hermitage is supported by:

Hermitage programs are supported, in part, by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax Revenues; the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture, the Florida Council on Arts and Culture, and the National Endowment for the Arts; as well as the Gulf Coast

Community Foundation, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

About the Englewood YMCA:

The mission of the YMCA is to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. We envision our non-profit organization – in partnership with others – as an intergenerational community hub with programs, services, and resources available to all persons, regardless of status or ability to pay, that will enable them to improve their quality of life. The Y is an all-inclusive organization dedicated to making an impact through life-changing services and programs that make our community stronger than yesterday by giving promise for a better future and providing a safe place where everyone belongs. For more information, visit YMCSSWFL.org.

About the Florida Alliance for Arts Education:

Since 1981, Florida Alliance for Arts Education (FAAE) has worked to bring schools and communities together to improve, enhance, and promote lifelong learning in and through the arts. The arts are essential to the vitality and quality of life in schools and communities. Education is even more powerful when it includes arts instruction and broad-based cultural programs. As the statewide umbrella organization for arts education, FAAE impacts thousands of lives each year, serving educators, administrators, students, families, and advocates in rural and urban communities throughout Florida.