

# TLHLIFE



Bookmarks created by Phillip Pollock, who serves as the president of the Friends of the St. Mark's Wildlife Refuge organization. PHILLIP POLLOCK

## Love for the 'little guys'

Artist helps 'highlight the refuge' with bird portrait paintings

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

When watercolorist Phillip Pollock is surrounded by the greenery and heat that accompany a Florida fall and winter, his mind's eye travels to a very different, distant landscape. Old hiking memories resurface from his boyhood as he remembers growing up in Iowa with his three brothers. Instead of palm trees, he imagines barren treescapes that lie in wait for a snow-covered blanket.



Phillip Pollock PROVIDED

While the scenes he paints from memory harken back to the Midwest's rolling bluffs and woodlands, Pollock's more recent works are a celebration of scenes he photographs at the St. Mark's Wildlife Refuge. Particularly, he enjoys showing his appreciation for the tiny but mighty variety of warblers.

"A lot of my intent in painting is to bring attention to and highlight the refuge," says Pollock. "I want people to know about the refuge, see these paintings and be inspired by them. I also want to bring these Florida birds into the thinking of people who love the refuge, and to let them know there are other birds out there besides the big eagles and egrets."

One of Pollock's recent paintings, "Pine Warbler in Palmettos," was chosen to be part of the 2021 Brush Strokes Tallahassee Watercolor Society Members Exhibition. This annual exhibition is curated by COCA for the Art in Public Places program on behalf of the City of Tallahassee.

Currently on display in the City Hall Art Gallery, Pollock's painting is one of 40 that cover a wide range of watercolor techniques and subjects. Both the physical and online exhibition is on view until Nov. 15.

See **POLLOCK**, Page 2C



Savannah Sparrow by Phillip Pollock, who has a watercolor in the Brush Strokes exhibit. PHILLIP POLLOCK



Snowy Egret in the Cathedral, Phillip Pollock: "When you see these large wading birds, they fill up a landscape and dominate a pond or marsh area." PHILLIP POLLOCK

2C | SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2021 | TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

# Pollock

Continued from Page 1C

## 'Celebrating the beauty of the refuge'

"Conservation is always an element of discussion," says Pollock, who serves as the president of the Friends of the St. Mark's Wildlife Refuge organization. "I use snippets of my art in our newsletters. In them, we talk about celebrating the beauty of the refuge and how to leave just a footprint behind, not trash. It's a delicate balance these days with climate change and development, and a lot of these species are not as prominent as they used to be."

Both nature and art have been an integral part of Pollock's life and career. In elementary school, he entered and won Dubuque County, Iowa's Fire Prevention Poster contests, and sketched birds as a hobby. In college, he was the graduate assistant at the University of Iowa Natural History Museum. Pollock's museum background allowed him to become familiar with the anatomical make-up of birds and other wildlife.

Pollock's family always dabbled in art. He watched his father sketch birds, and one of his older brothers was adept at copying and drawing figures. As far as outside influences, he always looked up to professional Iowa artists like Maynard Reece.

Reece is well-known for his paintings, which focused on ducks and won the Federal Duck Stamp competition a record five times in his life. Emulating Reece's bird specialization, Pollock enjoys working with small birds rather than focusing on the great blue herons or egrets that dot Florida swamplands.

### Creating microenvironments

"I really love the tiny little guys," says Pollock. "I try to put them in what I call microenvironments. When you see these large wading birds, they fill up a landscape and dominate a pond or marsh area. The warblers you have to be down at a ground level to see them, and I show them in their microenvironment to get a broader sense of the refuge falling away in the background."

Working at the end of his kitchen counter, Pollock draws up a blank sheet of paper and attaches it to a piece of plywood. He pins up photographs of both the foliage and the bird he wants to paint, and then will rotate his canvas around to approach the watercolor from different



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sides. He admits he used to rush through paintings when he was younger, but now will take several days or weeks to finish a piece.

For "Pine Warbler in Palmettos," he took several photographs of the lower, understory plants since the pine warblers tend to be found in those areas. In the background he was sure to capture the distant landscape across the marsh. Pollock says he spends a great deal of time working on scale to get the birds just right.

"I create a design with the plants I photograph and place that bird in situ more or less to show how that bird is out in the real world," says Pollock. "I do a lot of scaling and draw the bird in a number of sizes, then cut them out to position them in the work so that I know his or her size in relationship to the background."

### Birds are the stars

The result makes the birds the star of each work, perfectly situated in their mi-

### If you go

**What:** 2021 Brush Strokes Tallahassee Watercolor Society Members Exhibition

**When:** 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday through November 15

**Where:** City Hall Art Gallery, 300 South Adams Street

**Cost:** Free and open to the public

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-224-2500. This exhibit can also be viewed in COCA's Online Gallery. To learn more about Phillip Pollock, visit [woodlandwatercolor.com](http://woodlandwatercolor.com).

cro still life. While Pollock was teaching watercolor classes at the refuge a few years ago, he met the incoming president of the Tallahassee Watercolor So-

ciety, Jennifer Lange. He decided to join and begin formally entering his paintings into exhibits.

In Pollock's very first show with the society he won First Award of Excellence. He is humbled to have his work hang with paintings by other gifted artists in the current Brush Strokes exhibit and hopes visitors will enjoy the variety of paintings.

"Tallahassee has such talent where watercolor is concerned, and a lot of diversity in terms of styles and quality," says Pollock, who is grateful to be involved in the art community.

"Whenever I am in a distressed state of mind, painting and visiting the refuge changes my mood, my expectations for the future, my celebration of life. I feel lucky to do those things and I don't take it for granted at any point."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*