

# Artist preserves a sense of place in paintings

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Painter Randy Brienien is proud of the work he and his wife and fellow artist Debra have accomplished in a little over a decade. Last year accounted for one of their most profitable years as a team, with numerous commissions as well as recognition in community exhibitions like Creative Tallahassee and Chain of Parks.

Whether hung in a public or private space, Brienien takes it seriously when a work is purchased and enters a home. The intimacy of this exchange implies



**Randy Brienien**

that a work will be with a family for many years to come. Sadly, after Hurricane Michael devastated the Gulf Coast last year Brienien says many clients contacted him about lost paintings.

However he's optimistic that some places can be preserved through art. Such is the case for the Brienien's exhibit at the Artport Gallery, which celebrates the "Forgotten Coast" and reflects the beauty and iconic scenery of Tallahassee and the Big Bend area.

"I like the aspect of having works of scenes that are no longer there," says Brienien. "One that's going to hang [in the gallery] is of some dunes on St. George Island. After seeing post-storm photos of that area, those dunes aren't really there any longer."

Online he saw a photograph posted of two oak trees that had once stood in Cascades Park and asked the owner if he might use that as source material. Maintaining these landscapes is just one aim of Brienien's work; sharing them with eager art buyers is another. One

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## If you go

**What:** Randy Brienien art exhibit

**When:** 8 a.m.-11:30 p.m., daily through April 1

**Where:** Artport Gallery, 3300 Capital Circle SW

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit <http://coca.tallahasseearts.org/art-in-public-places>.

# Brienen

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painting he would never sell is an adaptation of Claude Monet's "Woman with a Parasol." The woman in his painting however is Debra, situated on a grassy knoll of wildflowers.

The working relationship between Brienen and his wife spans 50 years. They met in Illinois in high school, took art classes together, raised a family and have come full circle in Tallahassee with a unique art partnership. Though they paint separately within their home — Brienen prefers the sun porch — every once in a while he says they will "mind meld."

"She generally stays up and paints later at night and I'm more of an early morning painter," says Brienen. "But sometimes when I get up and look at my work I see brushstrokes that I didn't put on there. So I call her my little art fairy."

Brienen knew he had an ability to draw from a young age. Always sketching hot rods and dragsters, his mother continually encouraged his talents. He attended Eastern Illinois University as an art major, but was later drafted and sent to Vietnam. When Brienen returned from the service he and Debra did not pick up art again until retiring to Florida.

"When she started painting again I did too," remarks Brienen, who says they began professionally painting in 2008. "That was my emergence as an artist as well."

Working with mainly acrylics and mixed media, Brienen will sometimes use Venetian plaster in his impressionistic works. The process coats a canvas or panel with plaster and then works acrylic paint into the surface. Both he and his wife prefer acrylics due to the speed with which they can produce work.

As an impressionist, Brienen will take creative license in color extremes, while his wife chooses more realistic palettes. The cooler spectrum most appeals to Brienen as he heavily relies on blues and teals, using warmer colors as



focal points. He looks to mid- and late-19th century European artists like Monet and Renoir for this looser style of painting and storytelling quality.

"There's a story behind every painting," says Brienen. "When I'm doing a seascape, I like to emote motion in the

waves or in the clouds so that when the person looks at it they feel like they could actually be sitting or walking into the scene."

For the exhibition at the Artport Gallery, on display through April 1, locals and travelers alike will recognize many

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Artist

familiar spots like Bradley's Country Store, the Goodwood Museum as well as numerous coastal areas. Among Brienen's favorite works is one of Scipio Creek where the shrimp boats line up and are reflected by the water. Brienen is hopeful that the exhibit will not only catch peoples' eyes, but give them an appreciation for the panhandle's hidden gems.

For the Brienen's, the coast remains an ever elusive muse. Four years ago, they trekked up the Atlantic coast to Prince Edward Island taking thousands of photos along the way. Last year, they drove the west coast in search of locales like Big Sur and the Giant Redwood Forest.

Choosing photographs to paint from is a selective process, and Brienen says he is always looking for iconic coastal scenes or recognizable structures in Tallahassee. He pays attention to interesting light, shadow, depth and colors to paint. Ultimately, he emphasizes the importance of painting images that resonate with the community.

"Art is so subjective it's like buying a car," says Brienen. "The color, what it does, the emotion you get out of it...it just clicks. We've had paintings out in different locations and someone will tell us they keep going to see that painting until eventually they realize they've got to have it. I think having the work appreciated is most rewarding to an artist."

*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)).*