

JORGE BLANCO (www.jorgeblancosculpture.com)

Sarasotans who hunt for the comic strip “The Castaway” as soon as they open the local paper enjoy Jorge Blanco’s somewhat warped sense of humor. Yes, the creator of this naïve and very unlucky Robinson Crusoe is a very seriously famous sculptor.

A Venezuelan, he was trained in industrial design in Caracas, and there created sculpture expressing angst and a tortured view of life. In the mid-1970s in Rome, where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, however, he shifted gears to a lighter view. It was then that he developed the Castaway. When he returned to Caracas in 1980, he found his strip had become an overnight success.

In 1989, when he came back to sculpture after a period as an illustrator and graphic designer, he began to use bright colors on aluminum and added the touch of the humor that served him so well in the comic strip. Now his work in acrylic, steel, or aluminum can be found from Leawood Park, Kansas, and Petoskey, MI, to Tokyo, Beijing, China, and Caracas. We can see his “The Runners” right here in town, on Tamiami Trail across from Art Center Sarasota.



His private commissions include a house in Sarasota in which, art reviewer Marty Fugate wrote, “A Jorge Blanco sculpture spreads its wings like a red steel phoenix.”

The small pieces here in the gallery display the same elegant craftsmanship and sly sense of fun that attracted public art committees and private collectors around the world.

RUTH HÖÖK COLBY (www.hookcolbyart.com)

“Playing with color makes my heart sing,” says Ruth Höök Colby, and she sings in pastel. Critics have called her “the queen of pastel” and “a pastel girl in a watercolor world.” Colby says that pastel’s combination of soft texture and powerful color makes it her choice. It has versatility, immediacy, and-- above all—that vibrant color.



Colby, a long-time teacher at the Venice Art Center and Art Center Sarasota, is a member of the venerable and exclusive Petticoat Painters women’s group in Sarasota.

Her work can’t be categorized as realistic or abstract. Some paintings evolve from intuitive random drawings and present an idea from an inner perspective, she says. “Other times I tweak it a bit to add a touch of the abstract.” Landscape, however, is always the inspiration. Her land and seascapes have been prizewinners throughout her career.

Her mastery of the difficult pastel medium is reflected in awards from the Southeastern Pastel Society, the Degas Pastel Society, and pastel societies and shows all over the country. Her work is found in the book *Best of America: Pastel Artists and Artisans 2007*. She was one of ten landscape artists selected in an international survey by *Pastel Artist International Magazine* in 2002.

KATHLEEN COLLINS

If you shop at the Ritz, you may have seen Kathleen Collins' simple, well cut, comfortable yet elegant clothes. Nothing frilly or fancy or peculiar, nothing to grab your attention with a bizarre color or cut or trim. Just simple, well-fitting, classic clothing.

Is it easy to find clothes like this? Not really—no matter how much you spend.

A degree in fashion design and years of working in the design industry, Collins says, prepared her to create a clothing line that women love to wear. She knew from her years working in retail sales that women want to look beautiful while being comfortable, and she is no exception. "Like most women, I have always loved fashion," she says, "but my style has changed over time. Now my favorite fashion look is timeless style in beautiful fabrics that are easy to care for and travel well."

"The short version of my philosophy," Collins says, "is that you don't have to be tortured to look amazing."



HOWARD COWDRICK (www.firebirdstudio.com)

Cowdrick's small, gem-like pictures, usually small squares 12" or more, form series he calls The Spirit Rising, Meditation Garden, Metamorphosis, Contemplation, and Bindu. As we study these small images, we find odd and surprising things--peacock feathers, a scarab, a butterfly, a found object of mysterious origin. We may spot one of Cowdrick's castings in gold or silver. There may be black and white pearls, a bit of lapis lazuli or red coral, or a strange key, or an ammonite.



These other-worldly works are all about transformations, transitions, and the hope that life will be positive. They represent, Cowdrick says, "the twilight moments--the quiet moments during a prayer, a meditation, or when one is falling asleep—that time when suddenly a hidden thought or emotion seems to be revealed."

Cowdrick studied at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, the Ringling School of Art and Design, the Dayton, OH, Art Institute, and the University of South Florida. He is a long-time member of the Manatee County Art League, Sarasota Arts Council, Florida Artists Group, and Sarasota Digital Fine Artists.

RENEE DAVIS (www.reneedavisstudio.com)

Davis is skilled in metalworking and cloisonne enameling, chasing and repousse techniques, forging and etching. Texturing and dimension are characteristic of her designs, as well as unusual stones and many techniques. Now she added concrete to her list of materials. Ask her about her concrete jewelry!

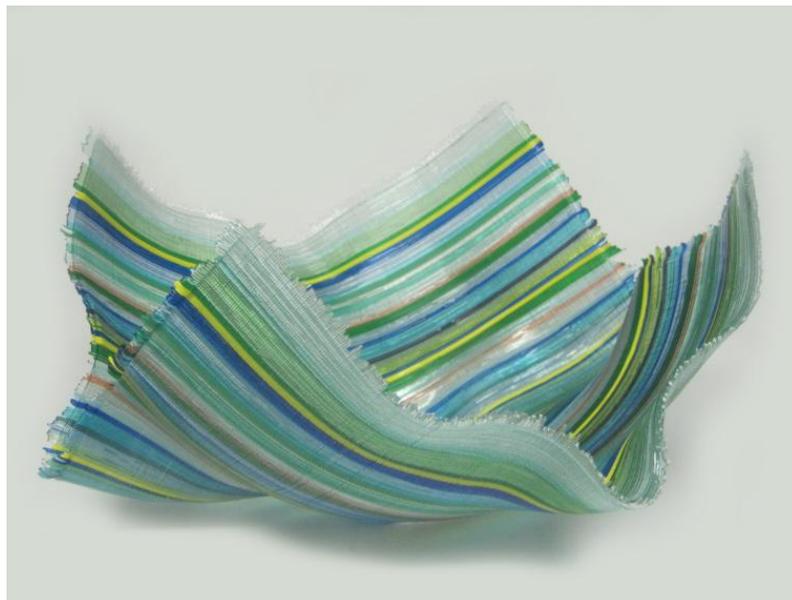
Cuff bracelets are all the rage these days, but take a look at her collection—it seems to have come from an alternate universe, studded with gemstones and worked silver surfaces, decorated with underwater images—bubbles, sea anemones, monsters from the deep. Her earrings continue the theme of natural objects--seashell earrings with a pearl in the center, waving geranium petals in silver, leopard frog pendants, heavy worked silver rings set with seaglass stones.



Davis is a member of the American Craft Council, the Florida Goldsmiths Society, Florida Craftsmen, and Art Center Manatee. She teaches at art centers and at her studio. Her work can be seen in galleries and art shows throughout Florida.

ESTHER K. JENSEN (www.esthersglass.com)

“Having lived near water all my life, the innate qualities of the sea infuse my work with glass,” says Jensen. Her sea is the North Sea in her native Denmark, though she has lived near the Gulf of Mexico for 25 years. Jensen had always taken a keen interest in glass, and when she met Else Willumsen, a well-known glass artist, in Denmark in 1995, she was inspired to learn how to make fused glass.



For five years she studied and finally set up her own glass studio in Boca Grande, Florida. She is still a member of the Boca Grande Art Alliance, and exhibits her work there each year. She is a member of the Art Uptown gallery in Sarasota.

The colors and shapes of her work, she says, reflect the beaches and fauna of the west coast of Florida. We see it in the intense aqua of her “Filigree” platter or the light sky blue of the Gulf waters in one of her fused and slumped platters. See the fused glass sculpture, “The Wave,” which was given a full page in the latest issue of *Season* magazine.

ELLEN KAIDEN (www.ellenkaiden.com)

I am drawn to watercolor because it is spontaneous and uncontrollable,” says Ellen Kaiden. “Capturing motion and color in water adds to the excitement.” She enjoys finding the form of each subject, and then its sensuality. She calls her style “Idealized Realism.”

Kathleen Bernhardt, gallery owner in Sarasota, uses stronger words: “Ellen Kaiden is to watercolor what Dale Chihuly is to glass blowing: she takes a small object and gives it scale and attitude, creating something uniquely her own.”

Kaiden attended Philadelphia College of Art and studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, the Interlaken School in Lenox, MA, and the Art Students League and the New School for Social Research in New York City. She studied privately with Will Barnet in Philadelphia, Herbie Rose in Sarasota, and Johanna Solomon in New Jersey.



Kaiden’s work has been shown in many juried art shows in Sarasota, where Katherine Butler gallery in Towles Court has been her home base. You may have seen her one-person show last month at the Sarasota Orchestra’s Harmony Hall.

KATHERINE KAYA (www.katherinekaya.com)

Kaya works in sterling silver with 14-K gold accents and semiprecious stones and offers the full range of jewelry: bracelets, rings, necklaces, pendants, pins, earrings, and even handmade Christmas ornaments. A look tells you that her sterling is something special. She loves the color of that metal. “I texture, brush, polish, and oxidize it,” she says. “I add gold accents and colored gemstones—vibrant colors as well as textured natural surface stones.”



How did she get started as a jeweler? “Over 25 years ago my mom gave me a bracelet that I loved so much that I introduced myself to the jeweler, took a class from him—and was hooked!” Her earrings, necklaces, and cuffs also have a distinctive style. She says she is “drawn to anything modern, with clean lines and simple geometric shapes, from architecture to industrial elements—something as simple as the vase on my kitchen table.”

Her most cherished art award, of all the shows she does around the country, came last May at the top-ranked art show in the country, Art on the Square in Belleville, IL, where she won the Barbara King award for jewelry. But “a smile on the face of someone wearing my jewelry is why I do what I do.”

MARY J. MITCHELL (www.drawntofashion.com)

A voice from the lost world of fashion illustration, Mary Mitchell shows us how fashion news reached us before Photoshop. For 35 years she made black-and-white sketches (that's India ink and fluorographic solution made into a wash) of designs by such luminaries as Oscar de la Renta, for publication in newspapers and magazines. Those of us over 50 will remember that those sketches were the main avenue for fashion news to reach us.

De la Renta volunteered to write the Foreword to her book *Drawn to Fashion*, which she was encouraged to write after a successful show of her work at the Durham Museum in Omaha, NE. Her pencil, pen, or charcoal illustrations document trends during a rich period in fashion's evolution. Mary drew it all, from bell bottoms to ball gowns, from leather jackets to leisure suits, from full skirts to miniskirts, from batik to brocade.

Mitchell got a degree in fashion illustration from the Albright Art School at the University of Buffalo, at a time when fashion had just ceased to be the sole property of the rich. She and artists like her defined the new face of fashion for retailers and all of us.



MEG PIERCE (www.megpierce.com)

Pierce is currently exploring variation and repetition using mixed media. "I like to combine fabrics, fibers, and found objects," she says. "I often use old objects, buttons, vintage fibers, and sewing notions." The embroidery, gold thread, handmade paper, brass pins, and other objects she uses may give her work a feminine cast, she says, but actually her work is a statement of personal history and self.



After receiving a MA in art and art education from Columbia University in 1969, Pierce began a 32-year career teaching art in the Long Island public schools. She received an MFA in painting from Pratt Institute in 1978, and in 2001 she left teaching to become a full-time artist. She has shown her work widely in the New York area. In Florida, where she has her studio at Towles Court, she has shown at Selby Gallery, Art Center Sarasota, Florida Craftsmen Gallery in St. Petersburg, and the Studio at Gulf and Pine and Artspace Gallery on Anna Maria Island.

She is a member of the Florida Artist Group, Women Contemporary Artists, Florida Craftsmen, and the Sarasota Arts Alliance.

KATHY WRIGHT (www.kathywrightstudio.com)

Landscape, says Wright, is where she got her start in painting. “I am a painter of light and shape,” she says. “I love light. I love the fantastic. I love the way the colors meet. I love the challenges of plein air—the elements, the changing light conditions, the bugs, the need to capture the essence of the scene in a brief time.”

Wright received a B.S. degree from Georgia Tech and an MA in architecture from Harvard University Graduate School of Design. After a brief stint working for several architectural firms, she moved away. “I was always less interested in the daily aspects of CAD drawings and door details,” she says. “The fundamentals of art and design are consistent across disciplines.” Today she is an instructor at Ringling College of Art and Design, with an enviable record of solo and group exhibitions from 2003 on.



VLADISLAV YELISEYEV (www.artist-yeliseyev.com)

“A composer uses octaves to convey a mood; I use light,” says this classically trained artist and teacher. “That’s especially true of landscapes, where understanding the nuances of light is a matter of life and death.” Educated in the seventies in Russia, he received an MA from Moscow Institute of Architecture.



On moving to the United States he quickly became known for his ability to reflect the transparency of natural light and to accentuate the artistic qualities of his architectural subjects. He taught at Parsons School of Design, and interest in his handling of light in watercolor led him to produce a DVD called “Painting Architecture.” Most recently he showed his watercolor images of landscapes and cityscapes from a recent European trip at Stackenborg Fine Art Gallery in Sarasota.

Since 2009, students at his Renaissance School of Art, both young people and adult amateurs, have been able to raise their skills to a professional level through learning the techniques of the old masters—the name of his school, Renaissance, is carefully chosen. A visitor notes the busts of famous Greek and Roman sculptures on wall shelves in the studio.

REBECCA ZWEIBEL

Zweibel is a self-taught potter who shows her work at Morean Arts Center's Center for Clay and at Florida Craftsmen in St. Petersburg, FL. When she lived in Alexandria, VA, she was a well known exhibitor at the famous Torpedo Factory artspace.

It was the versatility of clay, she says, that originally captivated her. "Almost anything I can see inspires me to interpret it in clay," she says. "It offers almost infinite variety, and I don't expect it will ever lose its fascination." She makes anything from functional pieces—teapots or vases or platters with images of bees or flies or other small creatures—to handbuilt forms and sculpture. "My vessels come from organic shapes, embellished with marks and colors," she says. "Drawing captivates me, and I often use the surface of my pots as a blank canvas, to paint or decorate."

Along with these handsome vessels, she is showing her striking puppet-like ceramic figures—"They are based on real people," she says, "and are meant to show their vulnerabilities and personalities." Eye-catching on a wall, they have a haunting presence.

