

# FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY®

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Francesco Gillia Myra Roberts Andy Howl Danielle Branchaud Marcus Jansen  
Dana Roes Michelle Tricca JAMA Barbara Albin David Sussman Helen Gerro



*11 local visual artists you just have to check out*

BY EVAN WILLIAMS  
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ARTISTS OPEN UP THE WORLD TO US, SHOW US WHO WE ARE and who we're not and who we wish to be. They reveal our darkest impulses and most casual whims and the complicated world we live in. They point out the things we might miss, things that words can't always describe. Their work can delight and disturb, offend and intrigue, inspire and deeply annoy, bore and excite and enrage, sometimes all at once. In some cases, a certain work can even change us, dismantle who we thought we were or thought we knew about ourselves or the world and reassemble us in the form of an artist's vision.

SEE ART WATCH, A8 ►



STEPHANIE DAVIS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Public art by Edgardo Carmona on display in downtown Fort Myers.

## Iron giants descend on downtown Fort Myers

BY STEPHANIE DAVIS  
sdavis@floridaweekly.com

As a large tarp was removed and the first Edgardo Carmona sculpture was unveiled on Bay Street in downtown Fort Myers on the morning of Jan. 7, Mayor Randy Henderson said, "It's art from the

Eiffel Tower in Paris to the streets of Fort Myers."

Shipped overseas from Paris, the iron sculpture, a dancer balanced lightly on one leg, and 22 others like it, ranging from 200 to 1,000 pounds and up to 10 feet tall,

SEE IRON GIANTS, A21 ►

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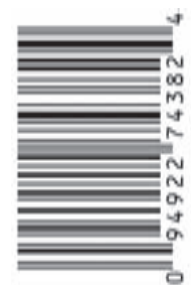
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COUNT ON 2 KEEPING YOU CONNECTED.



# ART WATCH

From page 1

Here is a sampling of the work of 11 visual artists we want you to know about, painters, photographers and graphic artists picked by *Florida Weekly* editors and staff. Their work in one way or another moved us and made us want to look closer. We hope you will feel the same way.

## Francesco Gillia

Francesco Gillia grew up in Rome surrounded by statues and works that depict the classic human form. They still provide a source of inspiration for his work. That includes a series of realistic, larger than life female nudes he painted for a graduate school thesis in 2012 at Montana State University in Bozeman. As he continued the project, dozens of women who heard about it showed up at his studio asking to pose. "I've never posed before, I hate my body, I want to pose," Mr. Gillia said they told him. "I think they



GILLIA

saw that it's about how beautiful the human body is," rather than stereotypes of female forms in popular culture.

He made the nude figures larger than life, he said, in part to make them as big as the statues he loved as a child, to suggest classic beauty in realism, and to make it as if the viewer were a tiny child standing before his or her mother, a symbol of life. The paintings tend to make men uncomfortable, he has found.

"Usually the women, they get it right away. The men, it takes them a little bit," said Mr. Gillia, who is 43.

He continues to paint and draw inspiration from male and female human forms, and teaches a workshop at Lee County Alliance for the Arts. His work is represented at Sheldon Fine Art gallery in Naples, on Facebook and at francescogillia.com.

## Myra Roberts

Myra Roberts's retro postcard-pop paintings capture the whimsy of old Florida tourism and vintage imagery. Her oil paintings have sold internationally as well as locally, including to the late great Robert Rauschenberg. In 2006 he bought her portrait of Audrey Hepburn, telling her she had captured Ms. Hepburn's "spirit."



ROBERTS

A long-time Sanibel resident, Ms. Roberts, who is 64, is part nostalgist. But she delves into darker subjects as well. Her latest works of social commentary celebrate the heroes and victims of World War II in styles that include photo transfer, an homage to Mr. Rauschenberg.

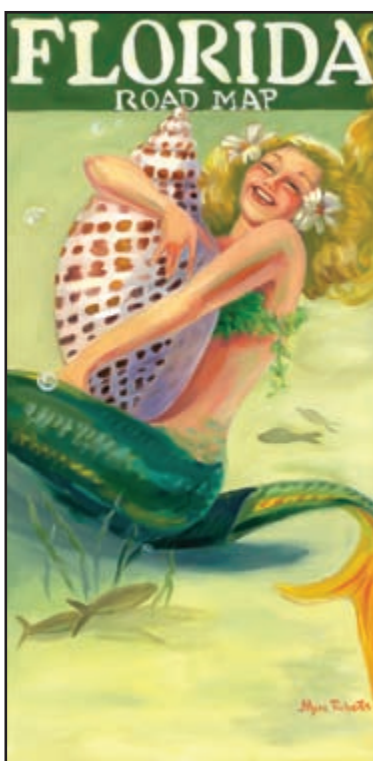
Some of her most daring pieces explore the famous American auto manufacturer Henry Ford's well-documented but underreported anti-Semitism and his connection to Adolf Hitler, a Ford admirer. Mr. Ford published dozens of newspaper articles disparaging Jews that he later collected into a book. The point is not that we should dismiss his achievements as an auto maker, Ms. Roberts said, but recognize a truth that, at the very least, complicates a man who is widely idolized, especially in Southwest Florida. Mr. Ford railed against Jewish refugees coming to America to escape Hitler's Germany.

"It's so much like today," Ms. Roberts said. "People are being wiped out in Syria, innocent children. I think it's important to note that really it's the same old same old in a way. As we enjoy our big-screen TVs people don't have shoes to walk on the road because they had to flee their homes. And these are your average doctors, teachers, bakers..."

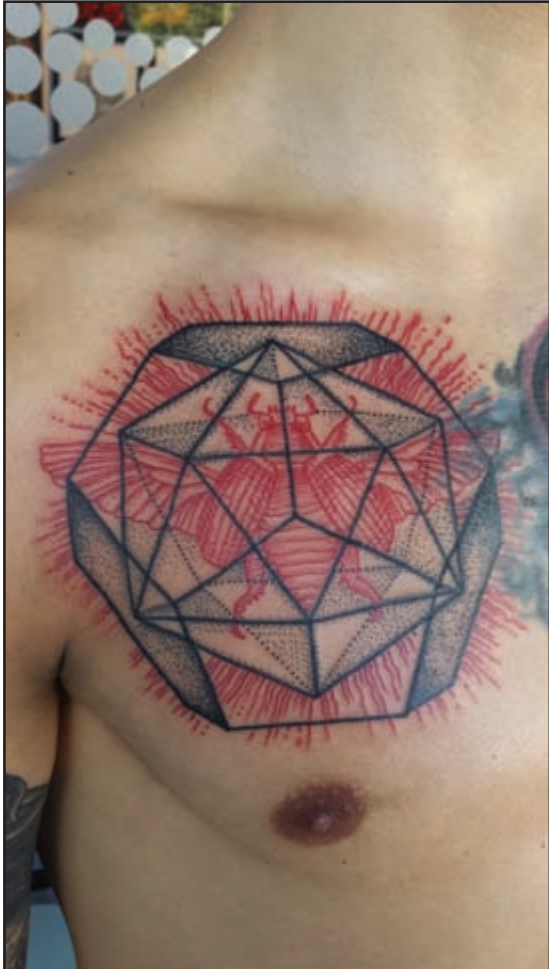
For her work, Ms. Roberts was recognized by WGCU's "2016 Makers: Women Who Make Southwest Florida." A PBS documentary about her life is scheduled to be televised this spring. A current exhibit of her work is on display at the Sanibel Library through Jan. 29.



"Dynamic Male Torso" by Francesco Gillia



Art by Myra Roberts



Andy Howl



Marcus Jansen



Andy Howl



Danielle Branchaud



Danielle Branchaud

## Andy Howl

With work that shows influences drawn from such diverse sources as comic books, Japanese myth, Americana and Pop art, Andy Howl's work, whether he's tattooing it on skin or creating fine art in multiple mediums, is as evocative as it is fun.



HOWL

"My taste is pretty much the same as it was back in art school and even before that," said Mr. Howl, 39. "I like a lot of the really old engravers like Gustave Doré and Albrecht Dürer. And newer work that has a similar kind of aesthetic, horror comic book artists like Charles Burns and Bernie Wrightson."

Few young artists have done more to celebrate the arts in Southwest Florida. He co-founded the popular monthly River District event ArtWalk and founded MusicWalk. A graduate of Savannah College of Art & Design, he has become a champion of mixed media and Low-Brow art, featuring regular exhibits and concerts at HOWL Gallery/Tattoo since he and his wife, Alainna Zwiernik, opened the space in Fort Myers in 2008.

In 2013, they moved the hybrid gallery/tattoo shop to a larger space across from the Edison Mall. See his work at [andyhowl.com](http://andyhowl.com) and the gallery's current exhibit, "The Devils Reign," on display at HOWL through mid-February.

## Danielle Branchaud

A surrealist painter who studies the landscapes of the mind, Danielle Branchaud's sometimes dark and contemplative imagination makes visible an inner universe of metaphor and intuition where anything is possible.



BRANCHAUD

"Everything I do is inspired by dreams and dreamscapes and introspection," said Ms. Branchaud, 30.

Working primarily with acrylics and on medium to large canvases, she is creating a new series of work scheduled to be shown in a solo exhibition at HOWL Gallery from Saturday, April 2, through May. The series, which she calls "Psychopomp," sprung from her research into psychologist Carl Jung's archetypes.

"She has a really good eye," said gallery owner Mr. Howl.

With a refined and illustrative sense of form, line and color, her work can at times blend classic human forms with dazzlingly colorful expressionist imagery.

"Combined with a survey of personal experience, her paintings have created a window through the eyes of the subconscious, into a place that illustrates those basest of instincts and emotions," reads a statement on her website,

[dbranchaudart.wordpress.com](http://dbranchaudart.wordpress.com). "The nightmarish imagery used to illuminate those unconscious thoughts serve as further exploration into the things that make us human."

Ms. Branchaud's work may also be found on Facebook, at Art Bar in downtown Fort Myers, and at her studio by appointment.

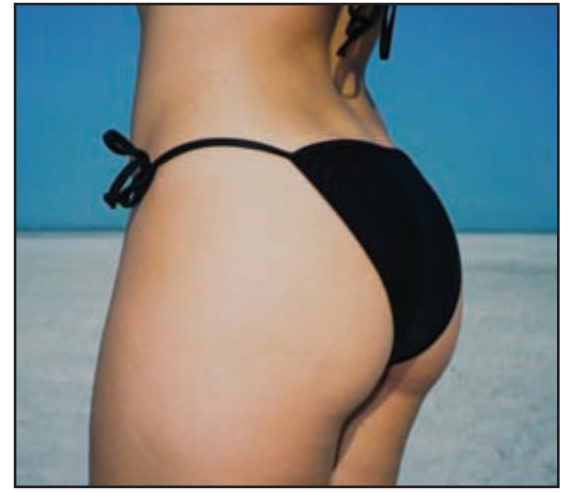
## Marcus Jansen

Marcus Jansen's big-canvas urban expressionist landscapes can be intriguing and complicated in their ambiguity. They sometimes also include anchoring images amid the ruins — a distant oil derrick, for instance, or Mickey Mouse — which suggest that his paintings are not made-up fictions but a form of reportage, commentary and critique on social, political and personal forces that he's wrestling with.



JANSEN

"A lot of times the paintings will tell me something that I don't know, and those are the ones that I like," he said. "I want something that gets me involved. If it gets me involved, it'll get you involved."



COURTESY PHOTOS

Michelle Tricca

# ART WATCH

From page 9

An example of what might be on his mind as he works: genetically modified food, increasing surveillance due to threats and fear, the militarization of police and the environment. Mr. Jansen often finds American painters' work too academic and unwilling to engage social forces. Street art is one antidote to that, he said, with Banksy's work being the most well known example. He has also been inspired lately by German painters such as Jonathan Meese. His early inspirations include 1980s New York City graffiti artist West One.

"I think there's a sense of fear a lot of times with artists and even with myself... of putting something out there that won't sell, that might be put down because it's not good enough," he said, especially when he was younger (Mr. Jansen was born in 1968) and had not yet shot to the near legendary, international status where he finds himself now. "But art has always been something that needs to question as far as I'm concerned. And I try to do that as much as I can."

Mr. Jansen's home studio is on the eastern edge of downtown Fort Myers. Part of the 14,000-square-foot space, Unit A, is also open to the public by appointment. "Marcus Jansen DECADE," a book about his

life and work was released on Jan. 1, "Marcus Jansen DECADE." A new documentary film by John Scoular, "Examine and Report," is being released this year as well. Mr. Jansen is embarking on a museum tour that starts this year in Europe and continues in the U.S. in 2017.

## Dana Roes

Often working on big canvases, Dana Roes explores "the notion of voids; missing pieces, inaccessible or unknowable spaces," she writes in an artist statement.

Put another way, Ms. Roes is an artist who is hard to categorize, following the work where it leads her, whether abstract or photorealistic pieces.

One of her most personal works is "THI" from her 2013 series, "Threshold." While the painting is of her mother's last breath, it is as intellectual as it is personal.

"I would hate it to take the spin of being sentimental," she said. "Why I painted it? I couldn't tell you. I think I was wrestling with the image and I was trying to understand it, trying to figure it out through my work. And I think I was somewhat haunted by that image and I just wanted to materialize it and understand it a little. Of course I don't understand it any more than when I was experiencing it but I got to be

a little more intimate with it. And strangely although it's a literal image I think conceptually it had to do with everything that I paint about. It's always that space in between..."

A trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art when she was young moved her to think about becoming an artist. There, she saw "Composition VII" by Wassily Kandinsky.

"Which is funny because I don't even care for his work but as a 15-year-old it just spoke to me in ways I didn't even understand," she said. "And I spent the next 10 years trying to understand it."

Ms. Roes is a professor at Florida SouthWestern State College in Lee County. She has exhibited throughout the United States and in Sweden, Australia, China and Iceland. Her work can be viewed at danaroes.com.



ROES

## Michelle Tricca

Michelle Tricca's photographs might be taken from the perspective of an outsider, or an insider. She frames documentary-style images with a laid-back, soulful empathy that is both sharply observant and seemingly casual. Some of her best photographs are filled with the sun and sand, bodies and bright colors and lost-in-the-moment bliss of the beaches that are so much



TRICCA



COURTESY PHOTO

Art by Dana Roes is on display at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery.



COURTESY PHOTOS

### "The Other Dream" by Barbara Albin

a part of her work, which is to say a part of her.

"That's just my soul," said Ms. Tricca, 46. "I grew up on the beach. I lived on the beach. I lived in Hawaii and worked in the surf industry."

One series of pictures, "Rehab," was taken in San Diego where she lived with five artist friends, some of whom had met at a drug and alcohol treatment center. As the house photographer, one Wednesday afternoon, she captured candid images of her roommates and some of their work. Another picture and one of her most personal is an image of the curvaceous butt of a professional swimmer. It's titled "Bunda," a Brazilian Portuguese word for a woman's sexy derriere. She originally used the picture for a T-shirt line.

"It's celebrating a woman's full behind, basically," she said. "And the reason I chose to put this on a T-shirt is I have a very curvy booty and I was always teased about it growing up. I grew up very self-conscious about my curvy bum. I'm so thankful for J. Lo and Beyoncé because they made it cool to have a big butt."

After moving to Naples to be near her parents she at first struggled with the change from the youth culture and open ocean beaches to which she was accustomed to the senior culture and subdued gulf waters off Southwest Florida. But one day she cracked open a fortune cookie that read, "Listen to the wisdom of the old," and was inspired. Her latest project is about our elders and their wisdom. See her work at [michellettrica.com](http://michellettrica.com).

## Barbara Albin

Barbara Albin is an intuitive abstract artist who has loved to create art since she received her first box of crayons as a little girl growing up in northern Illinois.

"To me, art has made me ageless," said Ms. Albin, who lives in Punta Gorda. "My son turned 40 and I said, 'when did you get older than me?'"

Lately she has been inspired by music, recognizing how the sounds of certain classical pieces or chants look visually on canvas.

"A few years ago I was asked to paint on stage for the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra," she explained. "When I heard the sounds I tried to visualize what color that is and what motion it looks like. I realized I had done that throughout my whole life but this focused it a little more intensely."

She aims to capture the spiritual and mystical in her work, whether of California redwood trees or Florida palms.

"What I'm painting is not necessary what you can see but what you cannot see," she said.

Ms. Albin sold her first works at age 17 to Northern Illinois University, attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and has been in more than 400 juried and invitational shows during her career. Her work is represented at Arts for Act Gallery in Fort Myers through Feb. 2 at Sea Grape Gallery in Punta Gorda and WildChild Art Gallery in Matlacha.

## JAMA

JAMA's bold geometric forms and rich colors reveal an artist whose obsessions and influences tie together philosophy, art, literature, Cuba and America into a singular, searching vision.

Jose Andres Mato Alonso was born in 1974 in Havana, Cuba. Since leaving the country in 2002 to be near his family in Naples, the painter, photographer, sculptor and printmaker has come to terms with what it means to be a Cuban American and to "find the thread and harmony between geometric anarchy and order."



### "Pills" by JAMA

Answering *Florida Weekly* questions by email, he wrote, "I have discovered abstract forms through geometry that make sense to me because they offer questions about the form of the abstract universe."

Aristotle is one of his greatest sources of inspiration, as well as Pythagoras, Einstein and Plato, painters such as Goya, Kandinsky, Rothko, Penck, Lam, Basquiat, and poets including Homer, Shakespeare, Poe, Marti, Paz and Kafka.

"I think the most challenging aspect of art is that it is never ending, it never ceases to search," he said. "And with it every day we learn."

He has also continued to learn, over the last decade, what it means to be a Cuban American artist.

"Ever since I arrived in Miami I have felt very proud of the work done by immigrants who came

SEE ART WATCH, A12 ►



Visual art and outfits by Helen Gerro

## ART WATCH

From page 11

before me. I did not fit in the political system of Cuba. This is why I have built my career as an artist in Miami, in exile, and why I have become a Cuban American artist. I am proud of this. I'm actually two things: One is in love with Cuba and the other is in love with this country."

And another love is the work itself, which ultimately becomes something bigger than artist.

"The painting process demands its needs, the same way children demand in life," he wrote. "Each work of art has a character, an identity, a life, its own ugliness, or its own beauty. I discover this and respect it. Each painting, at its moment, is the most important and no matter its beauty or ugliness what matters is

its character. I love American expressionism because of the strong character of its works."

You can find his current work on Saatchi Art: [saatchi-art.com/account/artworks/750645](http://saatchi-art.com/account/artworks/750645).

### Helen Gerro

A fine artist and couture fashion designer based in Punta Gorda, Helen Gerro taps into her vivid imagination for inspiration.

"I always painted what I wanted to see, not what I saw," said Ms. Gerro, 59. "I wasn't a realism painter. I always just paint from my imagination. I don't paint from a life form. And so it came from me... all of my paintings pretty much."

A self-taught artist, Ms. Gerro started out making

clothes that her classmates wanted to buy. Later her sketches of clothing turned into paintings, including watercolors, acrylic and oil on canvas. In the 1980s she lived in Manhattan and sold work to department stores and boutiques, before moving to Florida in 2002 to be closer to relatives.

She worked in alterations but after Hurricane Charley in 2004 was moved to get back to the artistic work she loved and started painting jeans, which became one of her most popular items. Then she developed a line of painted dresses as well. She's working on licensing her artwork to major department stores.

Her designs have been featured on runways in Fort Myers, Tampa, Sarasota, Naples, Miami, Minneapolis, Atlanta and New York. You can see her work at the Artisan's Atelier in downtown Punta Gorda and [gerroculture.com](http://gerroculture.com). Her work will be featured at Sidney & Berne Davis Center at the Art Walks the Runway fashion show on Saturday, Feb. 27. ■



GERRO

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