

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: The art of Rachel Pierce reflects her love for the sea and nature.

**'Ding' artist in residence program to feature Rachel Pierce for 2021**

The J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island began its artist "in residence" program in 2019 as part of its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, with hopes to continue it each year. Whereas COVID got in the way of those plans in 2020, the refuge, with support from the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), is moving forward with hosting Fort Myers artist Rachel Pierce for a 2021 program.

Most well-recognized from her role as former NBC2 morning anchor for five years, Pierce recently retired from TV journalism to devote more time to her passion for art and her husband and four children.

A lifelong artist, Pierce studied art in college, but eventually segued into broadcast journalism. She moved to Fort Myers in 2015 and became involved in community affairs as an emcee for events and a celebrity artist. The latter once more ignited her passion for creating her brand of whimsical, colorful, sea-inspired oil and acrylic paintings. She sells her paintings and line of jewelry throughout Southwest Florida, including DDWS' new Nature Store2 once it opens in November, and on her website [byrachelpierce.com](http://byrachelpierce.com).

As "Ding" artist in residence, Pierce will appear regularly at the refuge to do pop-up, plein-air painting along Wildlife Drive, teach art to children and adults on-site, live-stream from the refuge, lead opportunities to paint a canvas with the artist, visit youth facilities to help create art, and end the year with an exhibition of her refuge-inspired and other wildlife art from Oct. 1 through Nov. 10, 2021.

Pierce's first refuge appearance will take place this year on Dec. 1 for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration/"Ding" Darling Day. At that event, she will be demonstrating her style of nature art outdoors on Wildlife Drive with social distancing.

"I love all things Ding!" said the artist, who in March emceed Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash for the refuge's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. "I am always in awe of the wildlife, especially the birds during my visits. I often find my inspiration while there. How fitting and what an exceptional honor to be

the artist in residence at the place where I source so many subjects for my artwork. I'm absolutely thrilled to connect to nature, art enthusiasts, 'Ding' supporters, and 'Ding' visitors over the next year. I look forward to sharing with everyone my love for our beautiful Southwest Florida environment and creating artwork reflecting it.”

“Our refuge was created by conservation artist Jay Norwood ‘Ding’ Darling in 1945, so our artist in residence program honors that history and tradition,” said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland. “Darling created the Federal Duck Stamp program, designed the first duck stamp, and the refuge system’s Blue Goose logo. He won the Pulitzer Prize twice for his political cartoons, which were syndicated across the country throughout the 1920s and five decades.”

The refuge’s artist program began in 2019 with Idaho wildlife journal artist Ed Anderson, who worked with children from Quality Life Center of Southwest Florida in Fort Myers and PACE Center for Girls -- Lee County as well as visitors to the refuge for his special programs and exhibition.

For more information about the “Ding” Darling artist in residence program, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/artist-in-residence](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/artist-in-residence).

#### ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop profits.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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Dec 1, 2020 Rachel is announced as next AIR at our event and Art demos for our event  
January-April 2020 Plein Air Art with Rachel along the Wildlife Drive, Tuesday or Thursday 10am-noon?  
(or one day)  
Summer 2021 - Paint with Rachel -canvas painting Kids and then adults separate? more to come!  
October 1- November 15, 2021 Art is display in Visitor Center

Outreach with PACE or Quality Life, but this is offsite...

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**From:** Rachel Pierce <[rachel@byrachelpierce.com](mailto:rachel@byrachelpierce.com)>

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 7, 2020 12:48 PM

To: Westland, Toni <[toni\\_westland@fws.gov](mailto:toni_westland@fws.gov)>  
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: are you good with this...?

**This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.**

LOVE it! I'm up for all of it.

On Wed, Oct 7, 2020 at 11:29 AM Westland, Toni <[toni\\_westland@fws.gov](mailto:toni_westland@fws.gov)> wrote:  
Not sure if you heard from Ann-Marie or not... trying to start a schedule for you:

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