

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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

Caption: Rachel Pierce

‘Ding’ 2021 artist-in-residence program kicks off in January

Beginning Tuesday, Jan. 5, “Ding” Darling’s 2021 artist in residence Rachel Pierce will kick off a series of free biweekly, plein-air art demonstrations and monthly Friday Art Journal Walks at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. The refuge and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge support the season of nature-art events, which will also include visits to underserved youth organizations and a grand finale exhibition.

Through April 2021, Pierce will be doing her popup demonstrations along Wildlife Drive the first and third Tuesdays and Thursdays of each month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Visitors are encouraged to stop and chat with the artist, in a safe and distanced manner, while watching her create her brand of whimsical, impressionistic art inspired by sea- and bird-life.

The dates for her Friday Art Journal Walks are Jan. 8, Feb. 5, March 5, and April 2. Participation is limited to the first 10 people to arrive at the Visitor & Education Center flagpole by 10 a.m. Free journals and pencils are included in the nature-walk art lessons.

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 to 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 and celebrity artist for events. The latter once more ignited her love for creating colorful, nature-inspired oil and acrylic paintings. She sells her paintings and line of jewelry throughout Southwest Florida and on her website byrachelpierce.com.

Pierce's artist-in-residence program will culminate in an end-of-the-year exhibition of her refuge-inspired and other wildlife art in the Visitor & Education Center Auditorium from Oct. 1 through Nov. 10, 2021.

"I love all things 'Ding!'" said the artist, who in March 2020 emceed Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash for the refuge's 75th 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."

"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 and 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 five decades starting in the 1920s."

The refuge began its artist-in-residence program in 2019 as part of its 75th Anniversary Celebration, with hopes to continue it each year. Idaho wildlife-journal artist Ed Anderson served as the refuge's first artist in residence. Whereas COVID got in the way of plans in 2020, the refuge and DDWS are moving forward with their 2021 program.

For more information about the "Ding" Darling artist-in-residence program, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/artist-in-residence. To support the program, contact DDWS executive director Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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 or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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