

# WADING IN: THE STUDIO

FLORIDA ARTIST PROFILES

By Christina Cush

## ARTFUL Awakening

THE WATERFRONT INSPIRES A **ST. AUGUSTINE ARTIST** TO TRANSFORM HER LIFE—AND HOW SHE USES BRUSHES, ACRYLICS AND CANVASES.



**Above:** Boats on the water in *Afternoon Glare*; artist Alma Ramirez; a tranquil marsh landscape in *Harmony*.

**ON** a November afternoon in 2014, artist Alma Ramirez was strolling Jacksonville Beach, wondering how her life had drastically detoured. On the brink of divorce, facing single motherhood and missing her family in Mexico, she found solace where the waves lapped the shore. During this particularly transformative day, Ramirez whipped out her camera to snap some photos. As a trained professional artist, she never left the house without some artistic supplies to capture an inspiring moment. While she was clicking away, a wave doused her camera, leaving it beyond repair. But when she downloaded the waterlogged, pixelated images on her computer, she didn't see something broken; she had the epiphany of a lifetime.

"The pixels formed a broken picture, but also something

beautiful and new," Ramirez says. This fresh perspective motivated her to deviate from the realistic portraits she'd made after graduating in 2008 from Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura with a bachelor's degree in fine arts. Instead, she'd try something more colorful, abstract and straight from her heart.

"When I had that broken camera moment, my son Noah was about 18 months," Ramirez, 35, recalls. "That night, I put him in bed and started mixing colors and painting patterns as relaxation exercises." Over the next few weeks, she did more of this meditative painting, channeling positive thoughts and blocking out stress. "I was sad and overwhelmed, going through divorce. I wanted joy, vibrancy, boldness and peace," she says.

Ramirez, the second oldest of five girls, comes from a close-knit family of scientists, who nevertheless always encouraged her to explore her artistic side. When her older sister, Lupita, came to visit, she was captivated by the

COURTESY ALMA RAMIREZ

new works. Canvases with vibrant and modern interpretations of light reflecting off the water filled the studio, and Lupita urged Ramirez to show them to a gallery.

Ramirez started with Plum Gallery in St. Augustine. "The owner was there, and I was shy to show her my paintings," she says. "But she thought she could sell them." Ramirez sold six paintings in one month. Clearly, there was an appetite for her style. Since then, she's painted technicolor sailboats and their mirror images, playful palms swaying by the shore and ocean horizons bursting with possibilities. Now, Ramirez paints for eight hours every day, which is evident from her color-splattered clothes, and her art is sold at galleries in Naples, Jacksonville, Fernandina Beach and other parts of Florida.

Whether her work is hanging in her garage or selling out at big shows, Ramirez's hope remains the same: she wants to move people with her art, the same way she has been moved by others' works. "Seeing Monet's water lilies in one circular room, that was such a good curation," Ramirez says. "I felt so much in the moment. It spoke wonders to me. If I can make one person feel that way with my brush strokes and composition—that's my mission." 📍



**Above:** Vibrant colors dance on the canvas in *Three Palm Trees*.

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