

WADING IN: THE STUDIO

FLORIDA ARTIST PROFILES

By Christina Cush

THE NATURAL

THIS BIRD LOVER TRAINED AS A LAWYER, BUT A COLLECTION OF **AVIFAUNA WATERCOLORS TOOK FLIGHT WHEN** SHE STRETCHED OWN HER ARTISTIC WINGS



Above from left: Kristen Summers's *Great Blue Heron* in watercolor on paper; Summers at home in Tallahassee holding her *Painted Bunting* in watercolor on paper; Summers's *American Flamingo* watercolor on paper

Tucked away in the spare room of her Tallahassee home, watercolorist Kristen Summers is sprawled out on the floor in leggings and a T-shirt, surrounded by candles. She's combing through her cherished old Audubon books, looking for inspiration and trying to channel whatever kind of mood she's in. This is a ritual, meant to conjure creativity, that she practices a couple of nights a week after long days of working as a lawyer. Summers graduated from Florida State

University with a law degree and a dream of practicing environmental law for the state. Her love for biology, ecology and preservation began when she was a child growing up in the lush Miami suburbs, with a science teacher mom and a let's-look-under-rocks-and-find-creatures dad. Summers even earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Florida in natural resource conservation. Despite her plans to combine law and nature, she still felt something was missing. That all changed four years ago, when she picked

up a paintbrush for the first time to create a watercolor of a quail to give to a friend. And just like that, she discovered a new passion. Summers, who has no formal art training, explains, "Birds, watercolors and I click, and I create things I never anticipated I could. We were meant to be."

The artist, 31, launched her online retail site Bourbon & Birdies four years ago to sell her watercolor paintings of Florida fowl. About 80 percent of her customers come from Florida, which is how she wants it. A percentage of sales go toward

EMILY BRUNO



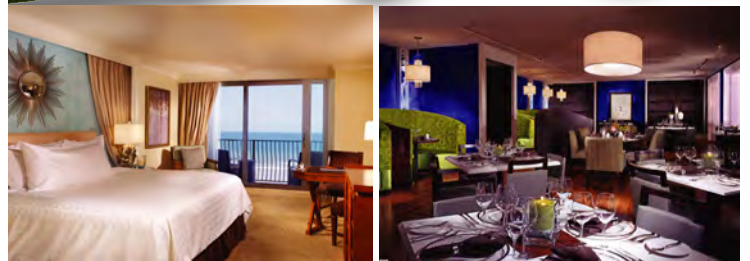
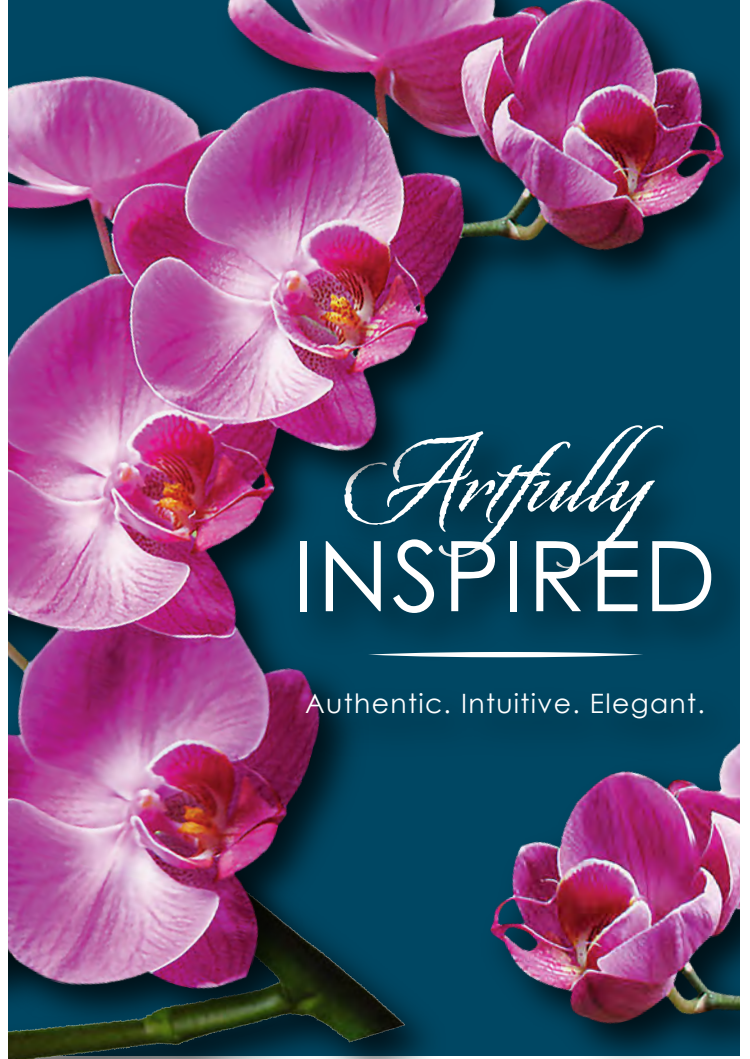
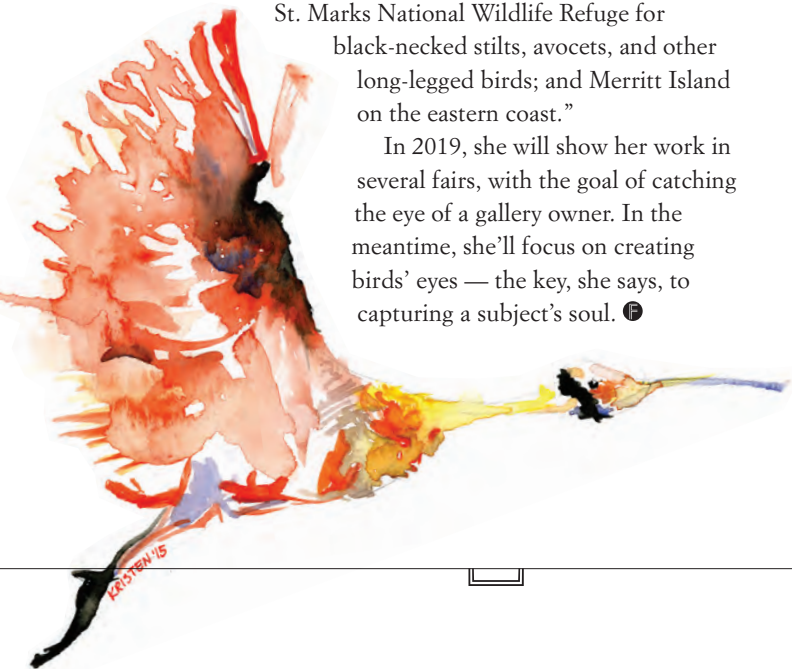
Above from left and below Summers's *Bald Eagle* in watercolor on paper, *Ruby-Throated Hummingbird* in watercolor on paper and *Roseate Spoonbill* in watercolor on paper

organizations aimed at protecting Florida wildlife, such as Tampa Bay Watch, a nonprofit focused on protecting Tampa Bay's estuary. But her work is also a love song to Florida's riveting natural beauty.

Part of her struggle in balancing being a business owner, full-time lawyer and artist is finding the time to relish the landscape that fuels her creativity. Last year, overwhelmed by her success at painting, she cut back on Florida art festival appearances to spend more moments in nature. Her favorite spots?

"Kissimmee Prairie Preserve. You take a long dirt road to get there, and it's a Dark Sky location in Florida—the light pollution is low, and the stars are outrageous," she says. Summers also has choice bird-watching perches: "Corkscrew Swamp, an Audubon location in Collier County; St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge for black-necked stilts, avocets, and other long-legged birds; and Merritt Island on the eastern coast."

In 2019, she will show her work in several fairs, with the goal of catching the eye of a gallery owner. In the meantime, she'll focus on creating birds' eyes — the key, she says, to capturing a subject's soul. **📍**



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