



# Eyes on the Prize: Latest Florida Prize brings in artists from around the state

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For the sixth year, the Orlando Museum of Art has selected 10 artists statewide for the Florida Prize for Contemporary Art exhibition.

The artists are emerging or mid-career, giving viewers a chance to catch these rising stars before they become household names. One artist will be selected by a panel of judges to receive the \$20,000 Florida Prize. Guests who attend the Opening Preview Party on Friday, May 31, will also have a chance to vote for the People's Choice Award.

Rather than poorly attempting more summaries of the art on display, we thought we'd let each artist share a few words about what they've made. Responses, received by phone and email, have been edited for length and clarity.

## **Robert Aiosa**

Age: 37

Tampa

Florida has a very different built environment than what I am used to back in the Northeast. I am researching about its vernacular architecture, its experimental housing movements and communities.

My work is in response to our constant changing urban environments. I am interested in the re-use, redevelopments of our neighborhoods and the how and why it happens. Currently I am researching the redevelopment of cities after disasters.

With my work, I want to start a conversation about the human experience, loss, displacement, anxiety and trepidation during change.

The Florida prize is a great opportunity to showcase the vast array of artist concepts and how they execute the work. It is great to have reaffirmation that our work matters and what we do has merit.

### **Joe Fig**

Age: 51

Sarasota

I moved to Sarasota two years ago to become Department Chair of Fine Arts at Ringling College of Art and Design. Florida has given me a community of very talented artists to share your ideas with, have a dialogue and inspire.

My work explores the creative process and the spaces where art is made. I work in sculpture, painting and photography. Each medium presents the work differently. The miniature sculptures of artist's studios along with the accompanying audio interview shed light on how artists work, what inspires them and how they achieved success, making it tangible for the young artists.

[The Florida Prize is] a time to take pride in the work that is being made in Florida showcasing the rich diversity of ideas and forms that takes, as well as addressing topics that are pertinent to today. Personally, being new to the state, I'm very excited to meet these artists and to have the opportunity to see their work in person and hopefully have this be the start of a continuing conversation.

## **Lilian Garcia-Roig**

Age: 53

Tallahassee

My work is large, often multiple panel, usually natural places. I pick undeveloped spaces. Sense of place is important to me. I want to make a connection to where I am.

I don't work from photographs. I go out and I paint all day long. For me, the change of light is welcome. What I'm really trying to do is transpose the experience of being in a place.

I want you to formally see the works and recognize identifiable things. I want to make the illusionistic possibilities of painting seem successful. But I also want you to be aware of my painting process and the material reality of the paint.

I like putting pieces together and then finding new formal relationships or spaces that are created where the edges of two non-contiguous paintings come together. I think that's a really beautiful metaphor for migration and how we assimilate.

Not many museums have big enough spaces to show my work. To be able to make a bigger presentation is always exciting, especially when it's contextualized with other artists you know of and respect.

## **Lola Gómez**

Age: 42

Daytona Beach

Florida has a unique personality and I believe anything that could happen in the U.S. will happen in Florida. There is so much diversity in the American culture in Florida that you can get indefinite stories to tell visually.

What I seek to communicate with my work is to send the message that we are not alone facing everyday life. Many times, we believe that we are isolated in the world and bad things happen only to us, and it's not true. My work seeks to connect feelings among people.

The world is a set of infinite voices thinking differently and a showcase like Florida Prize represents it. I simply hope the people who visit will enjoy it and share their thoughts with us regarding our work. And I hope in my case, people could learn more about social and humanitarian issues that I'm presenting in my work.

### **Amer Kobašlija**

Age: 44

Orlando

Florida is my adopted homeland, a place I deeply care about. It is a fascinating place, a visual feast for anyone — especially if you are a painter.

The more you look the more you see. The regional history is turbulent. As a painter, my aim is to engage with the society — not judge or impose answers but reflect on the place that I love and think of as home.

I get to understand the paintings through the act of making them, each piece individually and as a series — one work in relation to the other. Making is thinking. These paintings are reflections on my surroundings, the place where I live and the people I encounter along the way.

A landscape painting or a portrait is never just that — it's always being politicized one way or another, which has to do with the history of the place or the person being represented.

[The Florida Prize] about stepping outside the realm of everyday, while at the same time engaging with the world even more fiercely as you get to see it through the eyes of the artists in this exhibition.



"Leatherface" by  
Pepe Mar (Pepe  
Mar / Courtesy  
photo)

**Pepe Mar**

Age: 41

Miami

Miami is a big inspiration in my work. I came of age living in South Beach in the early 2000s. Outcasts were totally themselves, unfiltered, and nightlife was a way of life. Those seventeen blocks are emblematic in my imagination and have remained so since first moving to Miami.

Now that I have lived in Florida for 19 years and I have seen such enormous transformation in Miami, sometimes I find myself nostalgic for that bygone era of Miami Beach. At the same time, I am excited to embrace the future of this young city.

My work as well is an embrace of looking back (as in my fabric paintings) in ways that push my painting practice into the future.

My work deals with ideas of cultural alienation, sexuality, desire, queer spaces, collecting, fashion, collage, assemblage and personal histories. I hope young, queer audiences are inspired by my work and that it sparks a connection that will have an effect in their lives.

**Anja Marais**

Age: 44

Miami

I love the cultural diversity of languages and histories of Floridians speaking Spanish, French, Dutch and Creole, as well as Indigenous and African dialects. The pastiche of faces, stories, and cultures is a living collage that I base my own studio collages on.

My intent for the Florida Prize Exhibition is working at the interstices of categories, where photography merges with sculpture or sculpture with installation. Exploring niches that feel both traditional and contemporary.

My sculptures, depend upon found materials. I do not see these objects as a representation of “waste” but that of “possibilities,” Where the discarded, the broken, the unwanted can metamorphosize and regain dignity.

In a way, this exhibition and the Orlando Museum became the art hub in bringing all the different artistic voices together in one place year after year.

### **Edison Peñafiel**

Age: 33

Fort Lauderdale

The multicultural quality of South Florida has given me access to a variety of life stories that keep repeating such as migration and the search of a life and security.

I am interested in creating political art. I explore on personal and collective social experiences to find a common denominator. Using the idea of history as a repeating cycle and the moving image as the main medium, I create immersive multimedia installations that display an eternal parade, a perpetual loop of a specific event or social issue.

And as an experience for the viewer, I hope they find or make the connection on how all these works somehow reflect on our community from the individual to the collective.

### **Vickie Pierre**

Age: 49

Miami

Being a resident of Florida, particularly Miami, has brought me closer to my Haitian heritage and that has inspired so much of the internal narrative and visual aspects of my work.

In my process, I mine gender tropes, my Haitian American identity, global cultures and colonial history. My work presents a sort of romantic fantasy, beauty and inter-connectivity with the use of materials and forms synonymous with the Decorative Arts and the Arts and Crafts movement.

My hope is that the public will enjoy the creativity and commentary that Florida based artists can provide to the local and broader world stage and ultimately come to the understanding that “The Arts” in all forms are so integral to community engagement and education.

### **Sri Prabha**

Age: 49

Hollywood

Florida has a measurable impact on my work since the natural beauty of the land and sea that brings people here also causes stressors on the environment. I’m interested in exploring, and developing symbiotic stewardship of our environment through my work.

My exhibit at for the Florida Prize is a site specific installation, Spaceresearchcentre. I synthesize the possibilities across ecology, geology, and science in general. Where are we going and how will we get there?

This exhibit features some of the best living and working artists in Florida and brings their vision to one location for experiencing and viewing. I think of it as a mini Venice Biennale for Florida.