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## Village of the Arts

**We uncover a funky district where the art is as colorful as the architecture**

By Susan Friedman | Photography Larry Nighswander

The **Village of the Arts** ([villageofthearts.com](http://villageofthearts.com)) in **Bradenton**, near Sarasota on the **Gulf coast**, is a district for art lovers where folk art commingles with pop surrealism and good eats. Since the late 1990s, city officials have been working to gentrify what was then a downtrodden neighborhood. The effort succeeded. On 42 acres, the Village is now hailed as the Gulf Coast's largest artist-in-residence community. Throw in brightly festooned 1920s and '30s architecture — specifically some 40 cottages that perform double duty as galleries and residences — and this artsy niche is an eclectic and engaging must-see. Be sure to visit the most recent galleries to join the enclave, which include folk-art devotees Divine Excess and InnerVisions.



Touting legendary Florida artists, Divine Excess features pieces from Ruby C. Williams, owner of a roadside produce stand in Bealsville (east of Tampa), whose strawberry and melon paintings composed of acrylic on plywood have labeled her the queen of folk, says artist proprietor Zoe Von Averkamp. Thanks to her penchant for collecting and creating folk art — mixed-media altars and crosses — Von Averkamp was spurred to open Divine Excess here this spring. If you're hankering for art with a little yoga on the side, Carrie Price Whaley's InnerVisions Gallery and Boutique showcases colorful caricatures on canvas. Whaley's husband, Preston, shares the space for his biz, Yoga Arts, a yoga therapy studio. With baby Otis, the Whaleys reside above InnerVisions in the bright yellow and turquoise 1920s abode.

Special events are big here. "Grab a Gecko Party" on Sept. 15 showcases artists who design geckos as part of the city's third annual public art project. Come December, Bradenton will be inhabited by whimsical, over-the-top gecko sculptures.

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