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JAN/FEB 2024 | DISPLAY UNTIL 03/11/2024



# ABSORBING NATURE

Through a meditative mindset,  
a North Port painter captures  
the feeling of Florida's landscape.

WRITTEN BY MAILE PINGEL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN TIETZ





**F**rom her studio, a large outbuilding on her expansive North Port property, artist Cat Tesla transforms moments of mindful meditation into paintings. The rural setting, rich with trees and birdsong, offers ample places to sit and center herself before she begins working on the vibrant abstractions that have won her a devoted following.

“I want to enter my studio without any preconceived ideas about what I’m supposed to paint,” Tesla says. “There’s a great quote by Helen Frankenthaler I’m always reminded of: ‘Every canvas is a journey all its own. There are no rules. Let the picture lead you where it must go.’” In that spirit, rather than literally interpreting the landscape, Tesla instead conveys the feeling of being in nature, the sway of the trees inspiring her brushstrokes. “Abstraction is a response to life and the external world: It’s always

moving,” she observes. “Abstract art refers to the internal, the transcendent, the unseen. That’s what I’m sensing and responding to in my work.”

Before deciding to pursue her creative practice full time, Tesla was a genetic counselor at Emory University in Atlanta. “Science is creative problem-solving, and so is painting,” she says. It’s a quest that brings the artist into the studio daily, where she works on multiple pieces at a time thanks to a clever system of movable interior “walls” built by her husband. “The pieces are like siblings—they all grow up together,” she says with a chuckle. Her paintings, primarily done in acrylic and oil with details in graphite and oil stick, “all inform each other,” Tesla describes.

Currently, she is focused on two ongoing series, “Exhale” and “Feeling Good.” After making the move to North Port from Atlanta in April 2022, “The first thing I did was exhale,” the artist recalls. “There’s something serene yet active about the Florida landscape, and that’s

what I wanted to capture.” The resulting works are tied to nature and the seasons, some colors even pulled from the begonias and hibiscus in her garden. “Feeling Good”—begun during the pandemic—is nonobjective, more abstract. “It was my way of coping during that time,” she explains. “I kept visualizing that we’d all be feeling good again one day.”

Other recent projects include four works for Emory’s Winship Cancer Institute, where Tesla had once been a patient. Now cancer-free, she embraced the humbling opportunity for her creations to offer momentary mental escapes for patients living through the same treatments she once underwent. “I think of my larger paintings as worlds you can enter,” the artist describes, adding that she likens her smaller pieces to windows. Also on her mind is her annual lineup of classes, held both online and in person. “Teaching is my way of giving back, and it’s such a privilege,” she says. “Art is about conveying a feeling and evoking a response, but more than that, it’s about connection.”



North Port artist Cat Tesla (bottom) paints colorful abstract works (opposite) inspired by nature, particularly her own surroundings on her sprawling property. Creating art, she says, is part of her daily routine. “I like to honor where I am that day,” says Tesla, who transitioned to the industry full time after a scientific career.

