

## Sarah Hull's Aerial Beach Views More Than Just Enchanting from a Distance

By: Tom Hall: [www.artswfl.com](http://www.artswfl.com)  
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“Distance lends enchantment to the view,” Scottish poet Thomas Campbell wrote in “The Pleasures of Hope.” Nowhere is that truer than in the alluring aerial beach scenes of Tampa artist Sarah Hull that are on view now through May 26 in the main gallery at the Alliance for the Arts.

Hull’s beachy aerials are part of a two-artist exhibit titled *Along the Coast* that also features nautical abstracts by Laura Waller, also from Tampa. As the title intimates, the tandem show explores Florida’s immense and varied coastline. Hull began exploring her aerial perspective several years ago.

“I started out doing stills of donuts and cupcakes viewed from above,” Sarah reflects. “From there I branched out into landscapes,” which she took to a whole new plane when her next-door neighbor, a retired Air Force pilot, invited her to go up in his small aircraft for a bird’s eye view of the Tampa coastline.

“I brought along a pad and did several sketches,” recalls Sarah, who also took a number of photographs that she could use in her studio once on the ground back home.

“I’ve always been interested in how perspective, angles and shadows convey tension and mood,” Sarah points out.

SARAH HULL



To pursue that interest in earnest, she purchased and taught herself how to fly a couple of small drones.

“I took a bunch of classes and found out that they’re actually pretty easy to use.” Still, there were limitations she needed to observe. “I don’t fly them over crowded beaches or over people in their bathing suits. For legal purposes, you don’t really want to do that.”

The images provided by the drone-borne cameras inform her aerial paintings of sunbathers at the beach nonetheless. “They’ve really contributed to my understanding of how the Earth changes and moves.”



But the appeal of the aerial perspective from Hull’s standpoint is two-fold. First, she is enamored of the concept of looking at something in a whole new way. “Having two teenagers at home, it’s really hard to understand their perspective about things at times,” says Sarah, chuckling. “You forget what it’s like to be 15, 16, 17 or 18. So there’s nothing like turning things around, getting out of your own shoes and your own space, and asking how things look from a different point of view.”

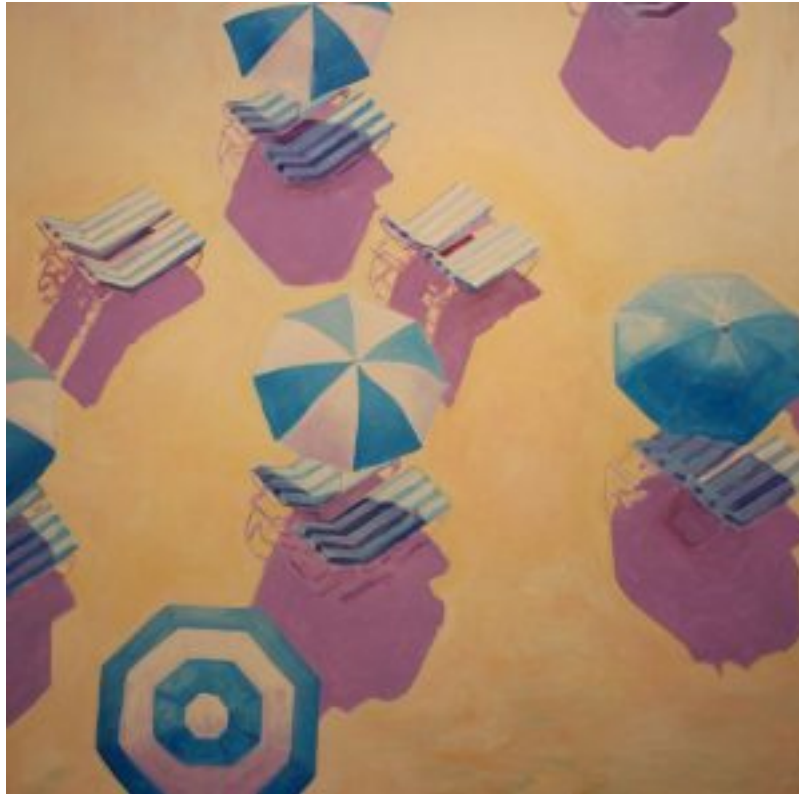


She's gone to great lengths to look at sunbathers from this very different perspective or point of view. In addition to making sketches from small planes and operating drones to gather material, Sarah spends time in penthouses and the top

floors of area hotels making sketches of the bathers sunning themselves on lounges, blankets and in the surf far below.

"A number of hotels let me sketch from their penthouse suites and top floor

rooms between check-outs and check-ins.” One of her favs is the Legendary Pink Palace of St. Pete Beach,



the Don Cesar Hotel that was opened in the heyday of the Great Gatsby Era in 1928. Designed by Henry H. Dupont and developed by Thomas Rowe, the hotel still serves as a popular retreat for the rich and famous.

But while looking down on the beachgoers from opulent perches such as that, Hull made an unexpected discovery.

“You see people lying on the beach in the middle of thousands of people, but they’re not connected to anybody. They’re all on their phones. The feeling of loneliness doesn’t always come through in my paintings, but my intent with this series is to evoke a sense of the isolation one might experience in a crowd; the juxtaposition of isolation and loneliness co-existing within a relaxed, leisurely recreational space, voyeuristically looking into, but not being part of the world below.”

The reason that objects viewed from a distance seem so enchanting is because their flaws do not stand out from that vantage.





But as you get closer, the blemishes suddenly emerge, and so it is with the growing phenomenon of urban loneliness, a condition being experienced in increasing numbers by Millennials and Gen-Xers. In fact, urban loneliness can be experienced by people of any age in big cities across the planet, whether it's Tampa, St. Pete, New York, L.A., Tokyo or Calcutta.



“Loneliness doesn’t necessarily require physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability to find as much intimacy as is desired,” contends Olivia Laing in her book *The Lonely City: Adventures in The Art of Being Alone*. “Most people complaining of chronic loneliness are those who have moved to bigger cities from smaller places to realize their aspirations.” Many factors contribute to feelings of isolation and alienation, including lack of meaningful relationships, break-ups, increasing workload, erratic schedules, long commuting hours and the pressure to prove one’s worth in a highly competitive work and social environment. It is further fueled by our growing dependency on our devices and social media platforms.

“If used as a tool to



enrich and increase the frequency of face-to-face interactions, social media tends to be associated with lower levels of loneliness,” states University of Chicago Professor John T. Cacioppo. “But if you look at it as a replacement for the face-to-face, it can flood you with loneliness.”

Chronic loneliness exacts a toll not only on an individual’s mental health profile, but increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer and sleep deprivation. Studies have also shown that loneliness can





result in an increase in alcohol consumption and less exercise. While she may not have suspected these outcomes while sketching in the air or from the top floor of area four and five star hotels, all it took for Hull to intuit that there was more to her pictorial surveys than a pretty aerial scene was coming down from the penthouse and sitting among the sun worshippers on the beach. "I've sat on the beach in Tampa at Spring break in March in the middle of 50, 60 people with my hat, taking pictures and doing my sketches, and nobody notices me," says Sarah, shaking her head incredulously.



“You’d think I’d be invading their privacy, but everybody’s is so engrossed in their own concerns., they pay me no mind.”

While there is plenty of visual and thematic content for viewers to ponder in each of Hull’s aerial perspective beach and pool scenes, Sarah derives yet another benefit from rendering new additions to the series.

“I’m drawn to water,” she effuses. “I grew up near the coast outside of Boston. My dad loved woodworking and he bought this old wooden sailboat when he was in his early 40s that he redid and learned to sail. So I have a lot of happy memories of bringing him tools and being around boats. That is another reason I’m drawn to water.”

You’ll be equally drawn to Hull’s aerial beach scenes. The Alliance for the Arts is located at 10091 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers, FL 33919. For more information, visit [ArtInlee.org/Coastal](http://ArtInlee.org/Coastal) or call 239-939-2787.

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