



LOCAL PAINTER  
USES COFFEE  
TO CAPTURE  
MAGICAL  
MOMENTS

# PAINT BY COFFEE



BY DANIELLE CHARBONNEAU

Local painter Steven Mikel is one of less than twenty artists nationwide using coffee as his primary medium.

Mikel, whose art was recently featured at Bailey Contemporary Art for the grand opening of Blooming Bean Coffee, recently partnered with

Thrive Coffee to advance sustainability efforts for coffee farmers in Central America. Mikel's unique paintings are an ode to the magical moments in life people usually miss.

**ABOVE** Steven Mikel, *Mountain Storm*, 48 x 36"

As local artist Steven Mikel opened the front door to his Coral Springs home, the strong aroma of freshly-brewed coffee wafted out and struck my nose like an invigorating smack to the face. The smell was delicious, roasted and buttery-smooth — intoxicating to a coffee-lover like me. Inside, Mikel immediately offered me a hot cup of black coffee with a heaping spoonful of sugar. As I sipped the hot brew, I peered around Mikel's home. His furnishings fit his coffee motif perfectly. Chocolatey-brown leather couches, natural wood bookshelves

and chestnut brown kitchen cabinets all complimented Mikel's paintings, which hung throughout his living room and kitchen.

His paintings—mostly large abstract canvases in monochromatic shades of java—are painted with Mikel's own coffee paint. He home-brews it by reducing coffee into highly concentrated shades of paint and washes. He applies the coffee to the canvases in layers, splashing, swirling, tipping, painting and using a myriad of textured materials like tee-shirts and rope to imprint the paintings, which all evoke a sense



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of enchanted nature -- rain drops, palm fronds, sea oats. Mikel focuses on the magical details of scenes that often go overlooked. The paintings feel somewhat reminiscent of Japanese ink prints or abstract sepia-tone photography.

Mikel is one of roughly 14 artists nationwide whose primary medium is painting with coffee. When he started back in 2008, he was just one of about four. There was Karen Elend from Tulsa, who painted the classics like the Mona Lisa and Last Supper using Espresso; Angel Sarkela-Saur and Andrew Saur, the trade-marked "Coffee Artists" who were featured on the Food Network's show Unwrapped in 2007; and maybe one or two more. Now, Mikel guesstimates there are approximately 14.

When Mikel first discovered coffee painting, however, he didn't know of any. Coffee art was a completely new craft he stumbled upon by accident when his father-in-law, Audra Rogers, had come to live with him and his wife. Ninety-three-year-old Rogers, who grew up during the Great Depression and was instinctively built to avoid waste, had been tasked with making the family their morning pot of coffee. Unbeknownst to Mikel and his wife, on Monday mornings Rogers would take the leftover coffee from Sunday church service and run it through their drip coffee pot to reheat it.

"After about two or three weeks we began to notice that on Monday mornings the coffee, well, just didn't taste quite the same," laughed Mikel. "Now, I don't consider myself a connoisseur, but I do like my coffee, so I suggested that if I could come up with a way to utilize the leftover coffee, that he would agree to not run it back through the coffee maker."

Mikel, who had been painting with watercolors for years and had worked in restaurants as an executive chef and professionally-trained saucier, had an epiphany: he could heat, then reduce the coffee to turn it into paint. This discovery changed Mikel's craft tremendously. Working with coffee not only shifted his palette from watercolor pastels to monochromatic browns, but also steered him away from his strict bond to realism, to abstraction. He found he actually liked painting with coffee even more than with traditional watercolors.

"I liked it far more because of what it was forcing me to do with contrast and how it was changing how I saw things," he said. "I think it



forces you down paths you would normally not have gone down. I was much more interested with the overall contrast of the piece."

In addition, the form reminded Mikel of photography, which he had gone to school for in his youth.

"The same things that apply to photography I had always liked and was most fascinated with growing up was that contrast and the details in the shadows," he said.

Mikel liked how the process of creating his coffee paintings was similar to developing a photo. In traditional painting, an artist moves from dark tones, to highlights; But in both photography and his coffee paintings, Mikel moves from light, to dark.

"It's a different way of seeing the world," he said.

Shifting one's perception is one of the most valuable benefits of art, Mikel says. Art helps people see differently. In his own work, Mikel hopes he can help his viewers notice the magical details of the world they might ordinarily miss.

"Throughout my life, I discovered that I noticed things that other people seemed to miss; discarded bits along the roadside creating textural compositions, intricate patterns woven within old peeling paint and rusty metal objects, or how pine cones and needles gathered in abstract clumps on the ground pushed together by the mountain breezes," explained Mikel. "I become entranced by the dynamic patterns of waves on sand, the juxtaposition between light and shadow as the sun rises upon the mountain sides...My artistic vision centers around the revelation of these overlooked or unseen experiential moments hidden within everyday life surrounding us."

Mikel said seeing these enchanted moments is important.

"The ability to help people realize that there is so much inherent, created beauty in just the smallest of things you walk by all the time," he said. "And of course, it's one of those pet peeves I guess I've always had. You get out of the car and you're just focused on what it is you are doing from point A to point B: 'I'm in the car. I'm going to Publix. I'm going to get groceries. And so forth.' What happens is that because

**OPPOSITE** Steven Mikel, *Corner of Aviles and Cadiz*, 12 x 19"

**ABOVE** Artist Steven Mikel

**BELOW** Steven Mikel, *Tween a Rock and a Hard Place*, 13.5 x 20.5"





# JAVA GEMS

Denver: the land of hippies, hipsters, stoners and ski bums; a second home to Jack Kerouac and his band of beatniks; a breeding ground for passionate environmentalists, organic vegans and aspiring yogis. Denver, my home town, is also a place for incredible local coffee shops with a rich selection of international, fair-trade coffees. At most coffee shops in Denver, the coffee is rich, dark, smoky and freshly-roasted, the couches are comfortable, there's board games, local art on the walls, live music and poetry slams at night—coffee shops are a place to lounge, work, interact and take part in a sense of community.

So when I moved to Pompano Beach and found that Dunkin Donuts was the go-to spot on every other corner for coffee (Fact: Florida has over 700 Dunkin Donuts), I guess I could say I felt pretty slighted. In Denver, the only people who go to Dunkin Donuts are troublemakers looking for a grimy bathroom in which to get high. (Ok, so maybe not the only people, but truthfully Dunkin Donuts is about the last place people go for coffee).

Call me a snob. Fine. But after about a month in Pompano Beach, I would have killed for a good, strong cup of coffee. I figured that surely there must be some hidden gems out there somewhere, so I set out to find them. I am happy to announce that I did indeed find several, and that local coffee shops seem to be on the overall rise. New cafés and specialty roasters seem to be cropping up all around Broward County.

The television show "Shameless" jokes that the first sign of gentrification is good coffee. So perhaps there's a larger trend at play, or maybe people are just wising up to the joys of coffee connoisseurship. Either way, I'm thankful for a quality cup. Here are some of my personal finds, as well as a few picked out by Pompano! magazine's coffee-loving staff. Each place has it's own vibe, culture and perks. We present: the Java Gems of Broward.  
— Danielle Charbonneau

we are so focused and so on-the-clock, we miss so much. Not only do we miss the people that need to see us smile, the people that need to see us say hi, but there's also the little pieces of the landscape that would help us understand what a beautiful world it is...the smell or the rain or the way it looks on the window. So my ability to take those small little compositions is something that has driven me."

In addition to the transformations coffee had on Mikel's own art and craft, Mikel also developed a passion for the topic of sustainability. From his early days of re-using church coffee in his paint, to now, Mikel's understanding of coffee and sustainability has increased. He recently partnered with Thrive coffee in September. Thrive is a co-operative of small coffee farmers primarily in Central America that joined forces to re-think the coffee market and make it more sustainable, profitable and environmentally-friendly. Thrive has agreed to donate expired coffee to Mikel to create his paint. In turn, Mikel is donating a slice of his sales back to Thrive to bolster their sustainability efforts. Mikel plans to personally visit some of the Thrive coffee farmers in the next year.

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY ABBIE GONÇALVES,  
DANIELLE CHARBONNEAU AND JIM MATHIE

## **The Alchemist** *{Hippie-Garden Paradise}*

**2430 N.E. 13 Ave., Wilton Manors**

**Hours: 8am-5pm. everyday**

**954-673-4614**

The Alchemist coffee shop is a secret gem nestled in the corner of The Yard, a creative collective area in the heart of Wilton Manors that features multiple local restaurants, a dance studio, a boutique on wheels (housed in a charming old school Airstream) and a local artisan market, which hosts live music and creative events. The Yard feels like its own little hippie village, colorful and hidden from the outside world. One might never find The Yard if they didn't know its location, tucked away behind buildings and shopping centers off NE 26 St. The Yard's eclectic and collaborative vibe is strongly felt, and the Alchemist café serves as the collective's social cornerstone.

The Alchemist's outside courtyard is a garden oasis with lush bushes, flowers, potted plants, statues and quaint wooden tables — a serene place to sip freshly roasted coffee,

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television and folksy art give the place a welcoming feel that makes one want to settle in to read the morning newspaper, devour a homemade omelette and sip on a refreshing glass of freshly-squeezed orange juice.

"It was always my dream to have my own small café and have it be like a family," said Gentiana, who is the type of owner to remember her guests names and faces. Chez Café is a place where visitors become regulars, then friends.

While Chez Café had been in operation for years when Gentiana acquired it, she combined her hospitable charm, Albanian upbringing and European roots to make the space and menu her own. Gentiana home-bakes her own goodies (including Scottish shortbread with pralines, decadent brownies with caramel and guava pastries) and sells Colonia coffee beans (both Italian and French roasts). Chez Café offers both a breakfast and lunch menu. The sandwiches are impressive, including the hot-pressed panini with turkey, bacon and caramelized onion jam, or the turkey apple sandwich with homemade raspberry sauce. For something lighter, Chez Café offers all-natural smoothies made with soy or almond milk and fresh fruit.

**Calusa Coffee Roasters** *Strong & Home-Roasted*

161 E. Commercial Blvd., Fort Lauderdale

Hours: Monday-Friday, 8am-3pm

954-449-4377

[calusacoffeeroasters.com](http://calusacoffeeroasters.com)

Calusa Coffee is named after the Calusa tribe, the original inhabitants of Florida. As a born-and-raised Floridian, Calusa owner Steve Hodel wanted something "Floridacentric."

"Plus the name flowed well," he said.

When he started Calusa about three years ago, it was the only place in the Pompano and Oakland Park areas locally roasting its own beans. Hodel got his inspiration after touring a myriad of coffee facilities in Costa Rica where he and his brother operated a travel business for 23 years. When Hodel decided to settle back in Florida with his wife, Hodel decided to switch ventures and roast coffee.

The building where Calusa resides has been in Hodel's family for over two decades. Hodel's father originally bought the property (previously a private home) for its parking space, which was adjacent to his chiropractic business. Hodel and his brother later turned the home into a local office for their travel business; then three years ago, Hodel transformed it into Calusa Coffee Roasters.

Initially Calusa was purely a roaster, but as people fell in love with Hodel's quality beans and rich, smoky flavors, they began requesting cups of hot coffee when they picked up their packages.

"My wife said, you're [CONTINUED ON PAGE 102]

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# JAVA GEMS

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crazy to turn those people away," Hodel said. So at his wife's suggestion, Hodel bought an espresso machine and began serving coffee.

Now Calusa sees a slew of guests popping in for a quality cup of strong Joe. Hodel says most people just come and go, but Calusa does have some seating inside where Hodel is happy to camp out with guests and trade stories.

Hodel roasts on Sundays and Wednesdays, switching up his beans and roasts every week, sometimes featuring single-origin beans, other times blends. Calusa has also partnered with a number of local businesses, including Holy Mackerel Brewing company who uses Calusa coffee in one of their craft beers.

### Living Green *Pure and simple*

**1305 E. Commercial Blvd., Oakland Park  
954-771-9770**

**info@lgfreshmarket.com**

**Open everyday 7am-9:30pm**

Don't be fooled by the strip mall — Living Green is about as gourmet of a market a real foodie can find. The colorful market is vibrant, with a rainbow or organic fresh produce, a deli counter that makes 100 percent of their dishes homemade daily from fresh ingredients, a hot bar with items like vegan lasagna and stir fry, a soup bar with six piping hot recipes, an olive bar, Greek-imported cakes and macaroons, kombucha on tap and jarred Amish goods.

As if the market itself were not enough, Living Green has a phenomenal coffee bar, serving Puro fairtrade coffee. Living Green is the only business importing Puro coffee in North America. Puro sources its beans from co-operatives who bring together hundreds of small farmers. The rich espresso creates the perfect crema, brewed in a Fiorenzto espresso machine. Living Green's owner and founder is a self-proclaimed coffee lover who has said that the the caliber of a business can be "measured by the espresso they serve." Hightop tables are available to hang, sip, chat and devour.

### Whole Foods Market *Enough Said*

**2411 N. Federal Highway, Pompano Beach  
954-786-3500**

**Monday-Saturday 7am-10pm, Sunday 8am-10pm**

Unless you're living under a rock, you know about Whole Foods in Pompano Beach. But what a lot of folks don't know is that they roast their coffee right in the store. There are about a dozen or so varieties to choose from. The raw beans are stored right behind the counter and you can watch them being roasted in a clear, tall roaster—taking on a deep rich color. The organic French roast is a deeper color and quite shiny due to being roasted at a higher temperature, which really brings out the natural oils of the bean.

The coffee bar is

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right at the front of the store and serves regular, old American style brew or classic espresso drinks such as cappuccino and lattes.

### **Coffee Cove** *Beach-Themed & Charming*

**Hours 6 am to 10 pm**

**754-333-8782**

Coffee Cove is a boutique coffee house locally owned and operated. Inspired by its location near the Intracoastal Waterway in the Cove Shopping Center in Deerfield Beach, the little cozy shop dares to change the feeling of the traditional coffee houses, with its bright light colors, baby-blue walls and beach-inspired theme. Coffee Cove serves farm-to-table cuisine and hand-crafted beverages.

### **The Sticky Bun** *Gooley & Sweet*

**1619 SE 3rd Court, Deerfield Beach, FL 33441 in the Cove Shopping Center**

**754-212-5569**

Sticky Bun owners Pauline and Mike Hrabovsky have both been Deerfield Beach natives for over 25 years. They both formerly worked at JB's on the Beach before opening the Sticky Bun, a charming little shop in the Cove Shopping Center. The Sticky Bun is most well-known for their homemade bacon and ooey-goey sticky buns, but a good cup of coffee goes well with both. The Sticky Bun serves Red Diamond, 100 percent Arabica coffee from Birmingham, AL, which has been roasting coffee since 1906. Cappuccinos, lattes and espresso is also available.

### **Undergrounds Coffeehaus**

*Artist & Outcast Haven*

**Located in the 3000 Plaza off Federal Highway, just south of E. Oakland Park Blvd.**

**3020 FL-5 #5a, Fort Lauderdale**

**Open Mon.-Thur. Noon-11:30pm; Fri. & Sat. Noon - 1am; Sun. 4pm-11:30pm**

**[undergroundscoffeehaus.com](http://undergroundscoffeehaus.com)**

**954-630-1900**

Undergrounds Coffeehaus is a hangout haven for young thespians, artists, book lovers, musicians and outcasts. On any given night a slew of high-school-aged kids and young adults sporting tattoos, piercings, vintage fashion and gutter punk throwbacks can be found huddled on the outdoor patio (which feels strangely reminiscent of a New Orleans balcony) chain smoking cigarettes or vaping. Inside, well-loved couches, armchairs, coffee tables, side lamps and cocktail tables are spread around. Red walls and dim lighting create a lounge-esq environment. Bookshelves full of used books are scattered throughout; a flatscreen with hundreds of DVDs underneath is in the front entry way; and chess boards, cards and crayons are strewn about for entertainment.

By far the most unique part of Undergrounds

however is their extensive menu of “Gourmet Tater Tots.” Undergrounds has over 40 flavors of tater tots including Curry, Chipotle, Jerk, Cajun and Cheesy Bacon. Other youthful throwback foods are available including microwavable pretzels, mini pizzas and pound cake. The coffee drinks are unique too — like the “White Russian” (white chocolate latte), “Grasshopper” (mint-chocolate latte) or “Peanut Butter Cup Cappuccino.” Undergrounds describes its style as “like going to Grandma’s minus the mothballs.”

Down the hall from the main lounge space is a small, cozy performance venue where eclectic events are held including slam poetry, swing dance classes, Rock n’ Roll yoga, Crochet & Cookies night, a writer’s workshop, open-mic and actor’s workshop.

Undergrounds adamantly supports the local art scene and is always interested in promoting new artists. Each new artist brought on board gets their own “Open Haus” and two weeks of exposure in the Undergrounds Art Gallery. Book donations are also always welcome.

### **Wells Coffee** *The Expert Roasters*

**Wells Coffee is served and roasted at The Seed**  
**199 W. Palmetto Park Rd, Suite #E, Boca Raton**  
**The Seed: [theseedboca.com](http://theseedboca.com), 561-430-5640,**  
**Open 7am-6pm**

**Order Wells coffee at [wellscoffees.com](http://wellscoffees.com)**

“Until recently it was hard to find good coffee in this town,” said Brandon and Nicole Wells, founders of Wells Coffee Company. “Lots of great people, but a ton of bad coffee.”

That is, until recently, when the couple converted their passion for delicious coffee into a professional pursuit. After a wildly successful Kickstarter campaign in 2013, in which they raised more than \$18,000, the Wells’ put their stake in the ground as the first specialty coffee roasting company in Boca Raton, FL. Setting up production as a small shop roaster in a newly established café called The Seed in East Boca, they began sharing their specialty beans with the community.

Recently, they were recognized by the culinary industry as the 2016 Rising Star South Florida Roaster of the Year. Nicole Wells became a certified Q-grader, a professional accreditation in the specialty coffee industry designed to empower professionals to accurately score coffee quality. The Wells’ will tell you: the work that goes into a perfectly detailed cup of coffee is a journey.

“Everything starts with the farmer, but once the beans get to us, it’s a process to determine exactly how to approach the coffee,” Nicole said.

Region, bean density, moisture content and processing all influence the way a particular coffee will be roasted.

“We’ve learned,” says Brandon, “that roasting is a combination of art and science.”

Today, the Wells’, along with their awesome team, are days away from opening their first headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, where they look forward to hosting remarkable people around the coffees they love.

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