

PRESS RELEASE
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For additional information and images, please contact Paula Martiesian at 401-521-7634 or at artsong5354@gmail.com. Attached images: Harris in her studio (photograph by Robert Easton) and a watercolor by Harris entitled *Green Seas*.

The BankRI Galleries present:

BankRI North Kingstown Gallery: “Watercolors and Banana Leaves by Karen Drysdale Harris,” December 1, 2022 through March 1, 2023. The branch is located at 1140 Ten Rod Road in North Kingstown. Hours are Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. For more information, contact www.bankri.com or call the branch at 401 294-7737.



MEET THE ARTIST – KAREN DRYSDALE HARRIS

The banana leaves tell a story of a young Jamaican girl who came to Rhode Island to start a new life. Karen Drysdale Harris was only nine years old when she stepped onto the tarmac at T.F. Green Airport. Her first thought was that the air smelled “different.” There were no warm Caribbean breezes, no turquoise blue waters – only the cool, grey green palette of New England.

Fast forward a few decades, Harris now lives in Cranston in a sweet Dutch Colonial house with a fairy tale garden. She and her husband David have two grown sons and she works an internship manager and career advisor at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Harris has always been an overachiever of sorts, an accomplished juggler of careers, family and making art. She has had an impressive array of jobs including account executive, assistant art director, caterer, colorist, graphic designer, illustrator and teacher. “If you’re Jamaican, and you

only have one job,” Harris says, “You’re no good.” She and her husband even started their own company Harart Designs, which focused on jewelry inspired by Native American petroglyphs.

Ten years ago, Harris’s husband gave her a small banana tree for their 25th wedding anniversary. She nurtured that little tree, cherished the memories of Jamaica it invoked and absorbed its aura as inspiration. Sometimes the leaves are the subject of her watercolors and sometimes Harris paints on the leaves themselves as if each leaf was a canvas.

A graduate of RISD, Harris credits the late Tom Sgouras, an accomplished illustrator and painter, with giving her the tools to become the watercolorist she is today. “I can feel the transparency and layering,” says Harris when she speaks of watercolor. “I see the negative spaces and the accidents waiting to happen. Tom opened up that world for me.”

Harris’ paintings are loose, fluid sketches of the natural world. The color combinations are soft, bold and unexpected. Big strong shapes, a sure confident hand and a sense of absolute joy permeate the paintings. They have a dancer’s energy, movement and grace.

As all jugglers do, Harris occasionally drops a ball. Working full time while maintaining a career as an artist is hard work and sometimes she falls short of her goals, but there is a deep well of creative joy inside her that cannot be contained. “There are times,” she says, “when my hair is a mess and I can’t talk. I’m very moody and I can’t do anything but paint.”

The BankRI Galleries are curated by Paula Martiesian, a Providence-based artist and arts advocate.

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