



Steve Songer . . . continued from page 1

While unable to consciously understand the magic that infuses vitality into his pieces, Songer does follow a clearly structured creation process. His subject selection, he says, is, "influenced mostly by light and color, shapes: just the basic things." Next, he says, taking a handful of rough paintings from a nearby table, "I do these little studies which are just for the purpose of doing larger paintings from. . . I've also got photographs that I take when I'm [on location], which give me information." Then, Songer creates up to seven black and white studies, "to come up with the painting that [I'm] going to do," he says. "These give you the composition. Then, I'll stretch a canvas and do a painting." For Songer, painting is as much a mental practice as a physical one. "Good paintings, I think, are created in your brain," says the painter. "All the great paintings are created because someone thought through a process and solved problems," he says.

The vast majority of Songer's process takes place in his Ogden studio. "Just because you paint something on location doesn't make it good, by a long shot," he says. "But, I think it's a good way to see and I think it's a good way to gather information, and I love to do it," he continues. "I go on. . . trips simply because. . . you get away from home, you get a lot of work done, and you learn a lot," Songer says, referring to his frequent travels. "But, it's not my favorite."

Davis County's widely-traveled native son prefers home. "My favorite place to paint is Cache Valley and Huntsville and Weber Canyon," says Songer, "right around in Utah." A valuable characteristic of the Beehive State for this painter is variety. "Here you can be looking at just about any kind of a thing you want to be looking at," he says. "It's not ever the same."

The beauty of the Wasatch Mountains, too, keeps Songer living and working in his hometown. "I think those mountains that we have here. . . are some of the best looking mountains anywhere. I mean, I've been up to the Wind Rivers and all over. I've been in Switzerland. There are no mountains that are more beautiful to me than these mountains," he says.

In addition to the stunning, multi-faceted geography of the state, Songer enjoys the exceptional talent that Utah nurtures. "There are some really good artists [here]," he says. "And the reason is. . . we have really good schools. Our colleges here. . . have been very traditional," says the Weber State and Utah State alumnus. "Most colleges. . . just talk about creativity. And you really can't teach creativity," Songer says. "But they try to teach things you can't teach and they don't teach you the things they can, like basic principles of traditional art, which our colleges. . . still do for the most part," he says.

As both an educator and an accomplished student, Songer knows teaching. The artist committed decades to the Utah public school system as an art instructor at Weber High School. "I taught for 25 years; and that was long enough," he says. Before beginning his career, Songer studied commercial art at Weber State University, then earned a MFA degree from Utah State University. Later, he was invited to the Royal Academy in London for a two and a half month fellowship.

In addition to his formal training, inborn interest and ability plus the support of Songer's parents have affected his life's work and his attitude toward it. "Like every other little kid that likes to do art, you

Art Professional Profile: Salt Lake City A New Chapter

The SL Art Center's Search for a Director
by Shawn Rossiter | photos by Gerry Johnson

This month's Art Professional Profile is about an absence rather than a presence; about a possibility rather than the actuality. In October of 2007, after over ten years as its Director, Ric Collier resigned from the [Salt Lake Art Center](#). The search for his replacement provides the Board and staff of the Art Center, as well as the community they serve, a chance to assess the mission of the SLAC and discuss the nature of the person who should guide it from this point forward.

Collier, who joined SLAC in August 1996, was the longest-tenured Director in its history. Longtime friend and colleague, Jim Edwards, the Art Center's Curator of Exhibitions, also left last year. Their departures mean that the staff at SLAC is relatively new. Though Program Director Roni Thomas has been there for a long time, Leslie Peterson, formerly the Assistant Director and currently the Interim Director, and [Jay Heuman](#), who took over as Curator of Exhibitions, have both been with SLAC for a little over two years. [Annie Kennedy](#), a local artist, was hired as Curator of Education earlier this year. Adam Price, who is heading up the Search Committee for a new director, has been on the board less than a year. They all recognize that this period of transition is an important one and share excitement about the possibilities the future holds.

During what we might call the "Collier era," SLAC went through significant changes. Staff and board members all agree that Collier left the Art Center on sound financial footing, with a growing national reputation and a history of exceptional exhibitions. The past decade has been marked by some discontent in the local community, however. Visitors have noted that the building is rarely overflowing with traffic; and some local artists have felt ignored by the Center. At the news of Collier's departure, Brad Slauch, a local artist and owner of Poor Yorick Studios, sent an open letter to the staff at SLAC asking to see if the community would have a chance to express their views on a new director. "I for one would like to see someone brought in who is considerably more supportive of the local art scene," he wrote, "as there are a lot of interesting Utah artists who have been almost completely neglected by the Art Center for years. The near constant stream of artists from elsewhere showing us slack-jawed yokels how it is strikes some of us as a bit patronizing, and I for one would like to see the Art Center mix it up a bit more."

Views like these, as well as those who wish to take advantage of the foundation laid down by Collier, give import to the search for a new director. In addition to Salt Lake Art Center board members, the Search Committee includes professionals from the local community: Susan Beck, a local artist and educator, Mike McGlothlen, an artist pursuing an MFA at the University of Utah, and Campbell Gray, Director of the Brigham Young University Museum of Art. "To the extent that mere presence can have an impact, we're off to a good start," says Price. The Committee plans to create a way to receive community input about the new director, though the format has yet to

just have an interest in doing it," the painter explains. "I've always had it. Both of Songer's parents encouraged his use of these innate talents. "But, ultimately," he says, "I think it has to do with your mother hanging your pictures on the fridge with her magnets. Some mothers throw them in the garbage; and others hang them up."

Other influential individuals in Songer's passionate pursuit of the perfect painting include multiple artists. "Historically, I look at people like Michaelangelo, Da Vinci, and Sargent, Monet. . . Mary Cassatt," he says. According to Songer, his most important learning resources have been the works of the American impressionists. "You look at a painting and you just wish you could do it that well," he says.

Despite his knowledge and accomplishments, Songer's humility runs deep. "I hate everything I do," he says. "So, I'm learning. I feel like I have so much, so long, so far, to go to be doing something I consider good," he admits. "With some of [my paintings], I just get so frustrated, I scrape them; I sand them off and start over again."

Regardless of these frustrations, or, perhaps, due to the underlying perfectionism they suggest, Steve Songer pieces are in high demand. Jennifer Lee Fargo, director of Park City's Montgomery Lee Fine Art, where Songer's work will show this month, has clients who plan annual ski vacations around this artist's annual show. Many other galleries and numerous invitational shows also seek the painter's magnetic masterpieces. "I've done a one-man show at the Eccles Art Center for the last 20 or 25 years, every other year," Songer says. Typically, he also participates in other local events including the Dixie, Zion's, and Springville invitationals. However, he says, "there are getting to be so many shows, I can't be in all of them. I've got to tell them no sometimes, kind of beg off."

Steve Songer's new oil paintings will be on display at Park City's [Montgomery Lee Fine Art](#) (formerly Taminah Gallery) through the month of February. An opening reception for the artist will be held Friday, February 8 from 6 to 9 pm. More works can be seen at his website, www.stevesonger.com.



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4

be established.

Price recognizes that one of the Art Center's most pressing missions is to improve its dialogue with the community. "It's not enough to just put on shows, but to go out to people and convince them [the shows are] relative to them," he says. Price joined the board in the Spring of 2007, after launching the [337 project](#), which, at Collier's direction, the Art Center helped sponsor. Price's involvement in the 337 project and work with local artists encourages him that any divide between the Art Center and the local community can be bridged. He notes that prior to his resignation even Collier was changing his attitude about local artists. He scheduled the entire Art Center for an exhibition involving 337 artists for June 2008.



The search for a new director began mid January, and Price says in the first week or two the Center had already received about fifteen applications. The Search Committee has not set a closing date, and Price says they will keep looking until they find the right person. "More important to choose right than to choose quickly," he says.

There is no pressing need for a decision. Heuman, formerly Curator of Education but now in charge of exhibitions, says the Art Center's exhibits are already scheduled out more than a year. And Peterson is acting as the Interim Director. Both are excited about the Art Center's future. Though they recognize the importance of a personality at the helm of an organization like theirs, they say the Art Center's Mission Statement -- "to encourage contemporary visual artists and art which challenge and educate public perceptions of civil, social and aesthetic issues affecting society" --provides them with a strong guide.

They see their most pressing role as communicating that mission to the public. Heuman feels his background in education (both at the Art Center and previously at Utah State University) will inform his curatorial process. "The Art Center is not taking a position," Jay says about the shows they put on. "It allows the public to see and make their decision." Peterson recognizes that their role is to challenge the viewer, but she believes that is done in a very personal framework. The art should be such that it is an opportunity "for us as individuals to respond to it."

Heuman is eager to become more familiar with artists in the community. In March, 15 Bytes will launch a new feature by Heuman, *Aristic Temperaments*, in which he poses the same question to a number of local artists and compiles their answers. Price is in a unique position to stay in contact with local artists. Since the 337 project, he has continued to keep email contact with the 150 plus artists involved in the project, letting them know of exhibitions by their peers and other opportunities. Peterson says the staff's ideas for the Art Center are limitless, their possibilities constrained only by money and human resources. A pivotal addition to those resources will be the new director.

If you would like to comment on the Art Center, its future and its search for a director, you can do so by responding to the post on our blog. Or you can direct your suggestions/comments directly to the Art Center by emailing [Leslie Peterson](#).

[return to top](#) ↑