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Jennifer Rasmusson . . . continued from page 1

Rasmusson's conversations with her art are beautiful indeed, stemming from a lifelong love of art. As a child, she took drawing classes and continued into high school, devouring every art class available. After high school, she attended Salt Lake Community College until they ran out of art classes to offer her.

Her early classes only intensified Rasmusson's need to paint and that need led her to Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts in Connecticut. For nine hours a day Rasmusson fine-tuned her creativity as she learned to communicate with her paintings. Traditional portraits and landscapes took flight beneath her brushes, but when the year ended, everyone's artwork looked far too much alike. Rasmusson left the school with a hunger for her own style, and she found that opportunity at the Dundas Valley School of Art in Canada.

Dundas operated out of an old factory with 27,000 square feet of studio space, providing a unique learning environment she'd not found elsewhere. The first two days at the school were designated for weeding out the students not serious enough to listen to their instructors. More than half the students abandoned their studies, leaving room for the passionate artists to excel in their studies. The instructors at Dundas never displayed their own artwork, so as not to distract the students from finding their own styles. Instructors left the students with assignments at the beginning of each week and returned at the end of the week to critique each work. Gone was the traditional structure of Lyme Academy as Rasmusson found her own voice. She made the switch to abstract and has never regretted it.

Rasmusson's work has evolved over the years as she has merged traditional and abstract in many of her paintings. She even experimented with collage within her designs, but has left that method behind in favor of the depth offered by the base paint she uses now.

"It has more substance to it, it has more depth to it," she says. Her artwork may have more depth but it's also become simpler and yet it's stronger because of the simplicity. "I think it's starting to become me now," she explains. "I'm not using other artist's work as crutches anymore. I think it's really my work now."

House painting brushes are common in the first stages of Rasmusson's work as are her "throw-away brushes" -- ones she's worked so hard on they don't last long. Together they create the perfect base for her abstracts. After the base is finished, Rasmusson works the paintings together, moving from one to another, exploring technique and design as she meets the needs of each piece. There are no preliminary drawings. It just comes together one layer at a time, each determining the next. Like good conversation Rasmusson's paintings are dependant on responses -- one layer tells her what the next must hold. As could be expected, there are

Rasmusson is branching out even further now. She's the president of the Cedar City Art Committee. As president, she's in charge of the annual CCAC art show at the Braithwaite Museum at SUU. "I think it's actually fun to see the process of how the show comes together from the other end," she says. As an artist, the organization of an art show is rarely seen, but Rasmusson has had the opportunity to experience both ends and she's found it insightful and fun. She's hoping to do more with the CCAC art show in years to come. "We're hoping to be able to build this show into something really worthwhile."

Rasmusson has also accepted a limited number of commissions and has enjoyed the projects, especially when given free reign. "I'm really branching out and putting work in museum exhibits, trying to build up my resume of museum work. That will eventually take me to other galleries," she says. Her work has already received astounding recognition. It has been displayed in a number of Salt Lake venues -- Art Works, Inc., the Utah Arts Council Annual Exhibition, Metro Art, Art Access, Phillips Gallery,; -- as well as the Fairview Museum in Fairview and the Defasco Gallery in Canada.

Her most recent work will be on display at a two-person exhibit at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center, 138 W. Broadway, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 5 - December 28. She is represented in Salt Lake City by **A Gallery**. Her work can also be viewed at her website, www.jenniferrasmusson.com. She welcomes comments about her art: Jenniferrasmusson@yahoo.com.

Project Spotlight Jim Mott's Itinerant Artist Project Comes to Utah

by Shawn Rossiter

In ancient Ireland, as I learned from a recent trip to the Emerald Isle, poets were revered, and in some respects regarded as the equals of kings. The greatest honor a man of substance could have would be to host a bard and accompanying entourage in his home. This practice became so widespread, and the poets so numerous, that at various times the expense of hosting the poets almost bankrupted kingdoms. With his Itinerant Artist Project, New York artist **Jim Mott** has created something reminiscent of the Irish sense of hospitality, traveling from home to home, exchanging his artistic gifts for the hospitality of his hosts (but, thankfully, posing no financial threat).

Mott stays with a host for 2 to 5 days. While there, the artist goes into neighborhoods and surrounding areas creating several small oil paintings each day. As he interacts with his hosts, he shares his philosophy, his creative process, and, before he leaves, a painting. Touring the country and staying in the homes of strangers, Mott has spent a total of six months on the road, stayed in 50 households in 23 states, and completed more than 300 small landscape paintings since 2000. His fall 2007 tour began in Seattle and will take him through Washington, Idaho, and parts of Utah before heading eastward to his home near Rochester, NY. It is the most extensive tour he has made since the original cross country tour in 2000.

Some have compared the itinerant artist to performers and other itinerant types of past centuries. Mott thinks of it this way: "It has been more a case of an artist living life at full capacity, in a context that is artfully and collaboratively arranged to support that end, but which is all the better for being real life, not something separate."

surprises. The less she analyzes her work, the better her pieces become, presenting a new level of achievement that all her paintings must meet.

Of course, Rasmusson doesn't dwell in her world of artwork alone. She is a wife and mother to two beautiful children. Though she has painted since she finished school, it hasn't always been the family's main source of income. Her husband, Ryan, used to work at a motel, but his hours increased and the couple grew tired of the time he spent away from the family each day. When Rasmusson changed galleries in 2002 and everything she took into the gallery sold within a month, she and Ryan decided that the artwork was paying well enough that they ought to give it a try as their sole source of income. "We just jumped in and did it and we've been doing it ever since," she says.

Five years later the artist is still in awe that she makes money doing something she'd pay to do. "I love going down to the studio. It's a great job," she says. It's also been an interesting transition. "There's always the balancing between Ryan and I between who does what and whose job is whose now, because I'm in the studio." Ryan paints the edges of her canvases, does the paperwork, transports paintings, and manages the business end of art. He also watches the kids while Rasmusson is in the studio.

Shaye, 6, and Braxton, 4, have grown up in art galleries and at art shows. Their home is filled with art and they've embraced it fully. Shaye critiques paintings through the artist's usage of shapes, colors and textures. Braxton recognizes the beauty of the colors and composition of everything around him. "Shaye says she's going to be an artist, but she also says she's going to be a rock star, so who knows? Braxton hasn't said he wants to be an artist, but shows more interest in it right now," Rasmusson says.

The children's continued interest has taught Rasmusson the value of including her children in her work. "Sometimes I let them come down and paint on canvases," she says. "They sometimes get to come down and do some under-painting for me." Rasmusson has also used some of their drawings in her work. "They were out drawing on the sidewalk one day and I thought, oh, those are nice lines. I need some of those lines in my paintings."

Her latest body of work has come from that sidewalk chalk and those innocent lines. It's carried over well to canvas as gentle figures with childlike attributes. The feelings communicated by the paintings are serene and comforting. The colors in her work have also changed. "From one body of work to the next, I can see change. I'm always trying to make each body of work better," she says. "There's always something new to explore or some new direction to take or some new paint or color."

As Rasmusson experiments with color, she is recognizing the strong influence of her surroundings. Her colors in the fall are richer, with oranges and reds. Summer brings brighter colors, and aqua emerged after a trip to Hawaii. She finds colors in nature that make their way constantly onto her canvas, but she also keeps up with the hottest colors in design. "Everything around me influences my colors," she says. Perhaps that's why her paintings appear richer and redder after a trip to Zion National Park, or why all her paintings were pink after the birth of her little girl.

Rasmusson gets further inspiration from flowers, papers, fabrics and nearly anything else with great texture or lines. Her past work includes a series on rocks and one on architectural angles. Her work has contained dancers, children and abstract figures. "One thing leads to another. Once I start painting, there's always new ideas," Rasmusson says. "It's just getting them all down on canvas. So I write them all down in my sketchbook." It's when she stops painting that she has to work to come up with ideas.

Rasmusson's success is a dream come true. She paints a few hours each morning and spends the rest of her day with her family. When facing a deadline, she often paints several more hours in the evening. "We love that we get to spend time with each other and it's always just worked out," she says.

As he explains on [his website](#), Mott was strongly influenced to start the project by Lewis Hyde's book, *The Gift*, "a fascinating fusion of cultural anthropology and literary criticism which poses the question: can art be true to itself, can it have life as a gift or be seen as the expression of a sacred gift...in a market economy?"

Using art as a currency for getting around the country and producing more art has been more than an expression of Mott's gift for painting. He has come to appreciate the "gifts" large and small he receives from others along the way -- from shelter to a cup of coffee and conversation. Through his practice of art, he is connecting people and culture and nurturing the notion of "hospitality," which he "didn't see happening much in the US, where, increasingly, distrust and fear and the desire not to be inconvenienced seem to dominate our interactions with strangers... where 'visiting' is something we do on the Internet."

Local artist and regular 15 Bytes contributor, Sue Martin, will host Mott while he is in Salt Lake. She learned about Mott's project through creativity coach Eric Maisel, when both her and Mott were participating in Maisel's online research on "making meaning" through art. After reading about the project, Martin says she "became intrigued by the notion of 'art as currency.'" In fact, I made it a practice to gift party hostesses during the last Christmas holiday season with small original paintings. I think they appreciated it more than another plate full of cookies."

Martin looks forward to some practical painting tips, such as a look at Mott's plein air gear and some tips on how to pack for a long trip. And, of course, she's also eager to hear about his reception -- good or not-so-good -- in various households.

The public is also invited to hear Mott speak about his experiences. While here, the artist will give a public presentation on his work and his practice of gifting art for hospitality at the Salt Lake City Main Library, 3rd floor conference room, on Monday, October 8, at 7 p.m. For more information, contact: Sue Martin, 801-209-3062 or visit www.jimmott.com.



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