

ARTIST

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It was so natural. She got me the paints because I was drawing all the time.”

It wasn't long afterward that Collett realized his life path. “I don't know if I was encouraged to pursue art as far as a career goes, but my mom was always encouraging. I was always kind of known as an artist. At the same time, I had self-esteem problems. It was a double edged sword.”

After graduating high school, Collett attended Salt Lake's Westminster College, where he studied with famed realist painter Don Doxey. From there Collett enrolled as a graduate art student at the University of Utah. Out of the 11 students who graduated, Collett was the only realist painter.

“I could do any kind of art I wanted to, and I experimented in grad school, but I always found myself going back to what I enjoyed,” Collett said. He was taunted for his realist preferences. Others told him that cameras made realist art obsolete.

“I really believed it in some ways because I was so isolated,” he said.

Taking courses from famed British portrait artist Alvin Gittins helped keep him on track. “He was phenomenal; he was magic in a way,” Collett said. It also eventually gave the young artist future employment as a portrait painter.

While Collett was in graduate school, the 60s hit in a big way and even the school's faculty was torn by the turmoil. As Gittins was an elitist, Collett found himself at loggerheads with his instructor on occasion. Because themes of politics, civil rights and radicalism took over the art program, Collett felt guilty for years for staying with his painting instead of marching in the streets as a protester.

While Collett was sympathetic with much of '60s counterculture, it did not affect his art a great deal. “I tried to, but all the stuff I did in that context was kind of contrived. I found that if I focused in on visual things and worked with that, my underlying feelings would manifest themselves,” he said.



Artist Sam Collett doing one of his favorite art-related passions: Teaching. Here he imparts his wisdom to one of his Josephy Center students.

Steve Tool/Chieftain

The struggling artist

After graduation Collett struggled to make a living as a full-time artist. He finally took art-related work thinking it would help him keep his hand in the game. He worked as a production artist in graphics. He freelanced, even seeking work as a litigation artist for courtrooms. He took work at the medical center of the University of Utah for about six years. It didn't help.

“Those jobs depleted me of my creativity, and I always did my worst artwork during those periods, or I didn't do any art at all. I decided those art related jobs weren't for me,” Collett said.

Physical labor in construction helped Collett focus on art. He also rented a studio at the Guthrie Art Studios, which helped.

“When I worked physically and went to the studio, I was really there and really energized. In those other jobs I was drawing or designing, but I wasn't doing any artwork. It's not self-directed. It looked like I was really drawing and painting, but I wasn't,” he said.

Not all of Collett's time in Salt Lake City was fruitful in the ways of art. “I went through a number of years when I didn't work (at art).”

A divorce happened during those years. Raising a son by himself and working con-

struction took all of Collett's time, and the artwork fell by the wayside. When he returned to the art world, he found that some of his skills had diminished.

“I got it back, but never back to the level it was before. I had to teach myself in order to improve my work and improve my craft. It was very hard and frustratingly slow.”

Teaching

Collett taught art off and on during his many years in Salt Lake and continues to this day. The teaching started while he attended grad school. A high school friend got pregnant and asked Collett to take over her classes at the Salt Lake Art Center.

“She called and she was going to quit and asked if I would like to take over her classes for her. I said sure, and I taught there for years. It was always the center of Salt Lake culture, and I loved it there. It was a small group of people – the weird types,” he said with a laugh.

He also taught at community art centers and at the Josephy Center and other places after moving to Wallowa County with his wife, Sue. For a time he traveled around doing workshops. “I've been teaching like that for a long time,” Collett said.

Over the years Collett learned to teach his students to rely on instinct as much as possible.

‘If you start worrying about brush strokes, in a way, you're putting the cart before the horse.’

Sam Collett

“I tell my students not to worry about technique. If you start worrying about brush strokes, in a way, you're putting the cart before the horse. I ask them ‘What's the main concept of the painting – what are you trying to do?’ That's the important thing, and you try to achieve that the best way you can. Do that, and the rest of those things will fall into place.”

Teaching isn't a one-way learning street. Collette has felt the influence of his students as well, particularly when it came to the nuts and bolts of art.

“Having students has influenced my art most definitely,” Collett said. As an example, Collett knew color theory by instinct, but when he tried to explain it to students he was lost. “Having to learn these things has had a great influence, because now I thoroughly understand all the aspects of what I do,” he said.

Leaving Cheyenne, so to speak

In the ensuing years after his divorce Collett met and married a fellow artist who became Sue Collett. In the late '90s the atmosphere around Salt Lake had gotten stifling for the two. It was a time for change.

“We were wanting to leave Salt Lake, especially before the Olympic games. We left in '98 when they were still getting ready for them. We were tired of it.”

Around that time a friend entered Sue Collett's drawings into an Oregon show called “The Wallowa Valley Festival of the Arts. Her drawings won several prizes. The couple decided to investigate the area.

NEXT WEEK: The Collett's move to Wallowa County • His wife's passing • Collett's art philosophy • his work today

FFA

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By 2011 the FFA Foundation was formed to seek better funding, leaving the Student Leadership Grant money available to the other programs.

Private donors stepped up to take on the cost, with Les Schwab and Wilco Farms as leading early donors. But the statewide program's staff is 1.6 full time employees.

To keep FFA alive in Oregon, teachers, volunteers and Oregon FFA Alumni have carried the weight of the program and poured in time and money. The Oregon Agricultural Teachers Association (OATA) estimates that contribution is valued at \$1.59 million in time, talent and monetary resources.

OATA has noticed that although the state has announced a \$1.8 million general fund shortfall, general fund expenditures have risen 40 percent since 2011 – though not a dime has gone to the FFA program.

With rising interest in supporting career and technical education (CTE) and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses, which provide the best if not only hands-on, real world application of technologies,

WHAT ARE LEGISLATORS SAYING?

Of the supporters of the House Bill, Democrat Rep. Jeff Barker is not rural. His constituency Beaverton/Aloha.

But Rep. Barker is a big believer in CTE and STEM programs because of his own experience as a youth in Benson High School, where students learned a job skill in addition to academic subjects. “I've always been impressed by the quality of the kids I've met in FFA.”

Another metro representative supporting the bill, Rep. Bill Kennemer serves

south Clackamas County. Kennemer said. “I think this is a great bill and I think we need to be supporting getting our young kids educated and giving our kids what they need to be productive in the rural and near rural areas”

Democrat Rep. David Gomberg of the Central Coast was not in FFA himself, but serves a rural district. “I recognize fully what great work they are doing to prepare the next generation of farmers,” Gomberg said. “I think appearing at the

hearing is an excellent way to help support this bill.”

Sen. Bill Hansell points out that his FFA experience benefited him in every endeavor – including training him to be a legislator. “With these bills we want to make sure that when it comes to the money provided through Measure 98, that FFA is a part of the discussion,” Hansell said. “We're saying to the Department of Education, ‘when you're setting this funding up and establishing it, we want FFA to be a priority.’”

the time seems right to request state funding for a program that is recognized as providing excellent training in leadership, business and agricultural education.

The value of CTE and STEM programs is understood. As a result, Oregonians overwhelmingly approved Measure 98, which taps lottery funds for that purpose.

The measure provides \$800 per student per year to help high schools drive graduation rates higher by mixing three

strategies shown to make a difference: CTE, STEM courses, more college credit classes, and doing more with dropout prevention programs.

According to records kept by the Oregon Agricultural Teachers Association, in 2015 FFA students generated \$13.8 million back into Oregon's economy through their SAE programs.

In Wallowa County, where the drop-out rate for 2014-15 was zero, that money may be more ideally be directed to-

ward highly successful programs such as FFA and to expand CTE and STEM courses provided through Ag/Tech programs.

At the Hermiston legislative hearing, Chelcee Mansfield of Union and Aspen Birkmaier of Imbler spoke.

Their message was personal and clear.

Schofield summed it up: “There are 5,800 FFA students in Oregon now and the only way to keep FFA growing is to provide more funding.”

HOW TO COMMENT ON THE BILLS

Individuals who would like to comment on these bills are encouraged to contact Joint Ways and Means subcommittee on education, co-chairs Sen. Rob Monroe (D-District 24) Portland and Rep.

Barbara Smith Warner (D-District 45) Portland. The email for that committee is: jwmed.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov. Letters written to that address will be entered into the public record.

Growing an already successful program that is in line with the principles of Measure 98 seems wise to the legislators who back the two bills currently in play.

Support for re-establishing funding is coming from both sides of the legislative aisle and not just from legislators with rural constituencies.

Rep. Barreto relates his prime sponsorship to teachers in his district. “I got involved because agriculture teacher J.D. Cant of Union and other teachers got together and put this together,” he said. “J.D. Cant is a constituent and asked me to be involved and I was happy to comply. The FFA presentation over here in front of the Education Committee was just stellar”

Then, support began pouring in.

A member of Stand for

Children has recently asked to speak on behalf of the bill. And Oregon Department of Education officials and legislators seem to “get it” he said.

“I had a meeting with Salaam Noor, deputy superintendent of the Oregon Department of Education, and he spoke very highly about FFA programs,” Barreto said. “I didn't even bring it up, he brought it up. I think FFA is very highly regarded around the state and around the nation. And I think the urban representatives, the urban guys, really get it.”

The bill represents the sort of reward for “best practices” that educators and legislators are always talking about, Barreto said.

“This bill is kind of an incentive grant where the folks with the best programs that put in the most effort should be rewarded.”

HOLDING

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The area lies between elk summer and winter range in the Wallowa Mountains, and spring chinook salmon also use the upper reaches of Hurricane Creek for spawning.

“The access to elk up higher during hunting season is crucial to hunters,” Richardson said.

That permanent access was in jeopardy, however, as Richardson said a private outfitter was also interested in building a lodge on the property.

Instead, the elk foundation purchased the land from the Hostetter family for \$520,000, with funding from the federal

Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Richardson said they appreciate the family's partnership to secure conservation on the land.

“It is open and available for public enjoyment. I think that's a huge success story,” Richardson said.

The Eagle Cap Wilderness was established in 1940 and now encompasses 359,991 acres.

It is the largest wilderness area in Oregon, and home to a variety of species including wolverines, bald eagles, bighorn sheep and mountain goats, in addition to fish and game.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.



The sun tried to break through snowclouds Dec. 17 above Hurricane Creek after days of steady snowfall in Wallowa County. The unplowed section of road that leads to the popular summer trailhead is an excellent place for cross country skiers and snowshoers.

Staff photo by Tim Trainor