



"Genesis"

PHOTOS BY TIM ENGSTROM

From the outside, in

Multi-award winning artist Frederick Somers depicts nature's inner beauty

BY AMY ACHESON

JUST SOUTH OF NORTHFIELD on a not so busy road that bends east sits Somers Studio & Gallery.

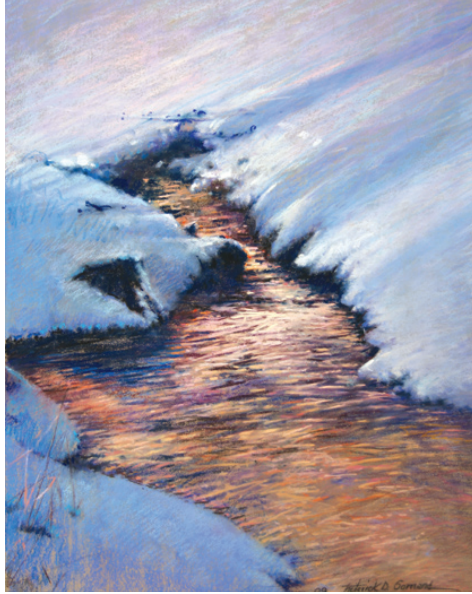
It's a quaint, picturesque country setting, typical of those in rural Southern Minnesota — with a farmhouse, red barns, mature trees and gently rolling sunlit fields that lay beyond ... but what renowned artist Fred Somers loves most about this place is the inspiration the landscape gives him to create art in his studio.

"My wife and I have chosen this place to live. We love this land."

Fred renovated the granary, now nearly 100 years old, for the purpose of a gallery. It's a mix of old and new. He incorporated salvaged pieces in the reconstruction like some antique glass windows from the Northfield Arts Guild when it was being redone, a stained-glass door found by a friend, and then there are the wooden steps that were a friendly barter a few years back. They lead down to the artist's studio, once an old machine shed that was rebuilt alongside the limestone brick walls of the granary.

Upon stepping inside his artist studio and gallery, you begin to understand Fred Somers' incredible talent. Viewing his paintings, you see he has the unique ability to draw out nature's wonders by bringing you close to them all the while incorporating the influences that surround them. The gallery's large collections of oil and pastel paintings include several of Minnesota's landscapes, reflecting endearing, close-to-home scenes with extraordinary artistic vision.

The prolific artist has won multiple awards for his work and has international exhibitions, commissioned works, gallery and studio sales and painting workshops.



"Simple Treasures"
24 x 18 inch pastel on Canson paper

Minnesota State Parks permit featuring Nerstrand-Big Woods State Park and is on the list of Who's Who in American Art.

And in 2009 Somers garnered two notable achievements: He was a featured artist in *The Artist's Magazine*, where he also won first place in the abstract division and was the 2009 winner of the Prix de Pastel Award from the International Association of Pastel Societies, for which he has been asked to be a workshop presenter in 2011.

Somers' achievements for his breathtaking landscapes are especially noteworthy given the fact that his formal art training was totally different from what he does today.

"I wanted to be a radical avant-garde artist and was in people's faces with my paintings. Everything I did was about a political

statement. People did all kinds of crazy things back when I was in art school and that was what I thought art was. A lot of things that I had as ideas of what art was

about, I've really radically changed. I actually don't think I would have ever known that I'd be doing what I'm doing right now with the way I started out. Thankfully, my life was changed by a loving and heavenly Father and it was so dramatic. Now I have great joy in my studio. I started painting the landscape — painting about love and about the beauty in life."

Somers shared this story that is one of many that changed his life and art forever.

"On a winter day, new snow in a woods about one mile east and south of here, called Quanbeck Trail, I was walking with my camera alone. I came across a limestone outcropping with dirt and grass and some uniform trees all seeking sunlight. I walked up to the limestone, and there were holes all over and every one of those holes had hoarfrost in them. I was so thrilled by the beauty. They were like gems! These little gems of frost ice were the most incredible snowflakes — only more beautiful — and the ice crystals sparkled with rainbow colors with the prismatic shifting of the sun through them. I instinctively backed off away from the frost so I could get a perspective of everything. I was enjoying the sunlight, the fresh snow, the trees and the sky. I stuck the camera up to my eyes and right there ... [I realized], I lost what I loved! Nobody will know what I loved! The thing that caught my eye was lost in what I just did, but if I moved up close nobody could understand the other part of it."

"So, that was the beginning of what I do now with some of my paintings (and it started some 20 years ago). It's about how close I can come to what gets me excited and what I love and then back up to show the context."

It's in those moments of wonderment and the relational insight learned that gives Fred this incredible vantage point for his fine art today.

Fred speaks fondly of their home in the country. He talks about the need to repair one of the barn walls on the south part of the farm but looks forward to spending time on his art. "I can feel winter is drawing near and there's things that have to get done, then I'll be free to come into the studio ... and I like that." ✦

"There is nothing so transformative as a snow. The snow comes down and touches everything — there's something so miraculous about it ... and the silence that comes with it." — Fred Somers

Somers was selected as the American Swedish Artist of the Year in 1984, and he has continued to exhibit and teach in Scandinavia. He designed the 1996