

James C. Christensen



b. 1942

Education and Training: BA, BYU, 1967; MA, BYU, 1968

Job Position in 2006: Artist (painting, fine art prints, porcelain, brass). His work is inspired by myths, fables, and other imaginative stories. He taught art professionally for over twenty years.

Family: Christensen was born and raised in Culver City, CA. He is married to Carole Christensen. They live in Orem, UT, and have five children.

Awards and Honors:

Time/Life Books and *Omni* have commissioned him to create works for books and magazines. His work has been published in the *American Illustration Annual* and in *Japan's Outstanding American Illustrators*.

He has received every professional art honor granted by the World Science Fiction Convention. He has earned multiple Chesley Awards from the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists.

He has received the Governor's Award for Art from the Utah Arts Council.

He has been inducted into the U.S. Art Magazine's Hall of Fame.

Works: Examples of his work can be seen at several locations on the Web. Simply click Google, type in James C. Christensen, and several sites will come up. Examples:

http://www.galleryone.com/christensen_prints.htm

http://www.world-wide-art.com/art/James_Christensen/google.html

http://www.greenwichworkshop.com/studio/studio_artist.asp?artistid=16

Books:

A Journey of the Imagination: The Art of James Christensen (1994)

Voyage of the Basset (1996)

Rhymes & Reasons (1997)

Parables and Other Teaching Stories (written by Robert Millet, 1999)

The Personal Illumination Series (2000)

The Personal Illumination Journal (2000)

A Shakespeare Sketchbook (2001)

James Christensen, Foremost Fantasy Artist (2001)

Questions and Comments:

In 2006, James Christensen discussed his background, described his approach to art, and answered questions on the BYU Broadcasting program *Time for Teens*.

Video presentation: [mp4](#) or [avi](#)

He talks about the impact of marriage and family on his work, the development of his unique style and approach, the broad range of training that allows him to do such varied styles, and the importance of the titles he assigns to his works.



Notes and Quotes:

“Life seems to be more complicated than ever. And, all too often, too serious. I use my artwork to ease the burdens of everyday stuff. My characters deal with the same problems we all face in what we call ‘life.’ Their unique point of view helps me put my own problems in perspective with a smile—and hopefully yours. We are all on this journey together and anything we can do to help each other is a good thing.” James C. Christensen.



“Opulent, colorful, Shakespearean, extraordinary: All words that aptly portray Christensen’s most popular artworks that have also been described as ‘creations from the land a little left of reality.’ He has created a Shakespearean Island, an entire undersea world and a village of Mother Goose characters. But when he isn’t giving life to other’s worlds, he paints a place of his own. The result is a unique kinetic kingdom where recognizable human emotions are often manifested as fish or fowl, utilizing the viewer’s own imagination as no other artist can. His art includes unique people, places and things that exist somewhere between adult dreams and childhood memories. ‘I don’t think of myself as a fantasy artist,’ said Christensen. ‘I certainly have an affinity for myths, fables and ancient lore, but I also find time to create landscapes and other subjects which include commissions.’ Recent projects, for example, include a mural commission for a conference center in Nauvoo, Illinois, a poster for the 2001 Utah Shakespearean Festival and a sculpture for Nu-Skin. ‘What’s truly important to me is that my art is introspective and in turn challenges the mind’s eye of those who view it regardless of the subject matter.’” Greenwich Workshop.com—James C. Christensen

James C. Christensen: A Fish out of Water:

—John Blodgett for *Utah Business*

FISH INHABIT THE HUMAN WORLD—breathing air, walking on leashes, balancing on noses—in James C. Christensen’s art.

“Why not stick a fish in it?” he says. “If I [paint] a guy walking a fish it’s more fun. Fish became a reminder that the paintings are magical.”

Christensen, who lives in Orem, has gained fame over the past 20 years by painting “unique people, places and things that exist somewhere between adult dreams and childhood memories,” according to a Web site that features his work. But, he says that as fantastic as his work can be, it’s often grounded in reality, with conscious thought, not dreams, behind every stroke of his brush.

Take the “poofy” men, for whom he is arguably best known. These men exist under heavy layers of clothing, and though they often are unsmiling, Christensen’s intent is to elicit a knowing grin from the viewer, to get us to laugh at our own weaknesses. “They’re wearing on the outside what I think of as baggage,” Christensen says. “They become us. We’re all human, we’re all flawed, but we’re also colorful and fun.”

He sometimes interprets the classics. Jack Be Nimble is hilarious, with a poofy, aloof Jack appearing incapable of stepping—never mind jumping—over a candlestick. But there’s more to Christensen’s portfolio. Though works with titles such as *Lawrence Pretended Not to Notice That a Bear Had Attached Himself to His Coattails* suggest the extent of his whimsy, others such as *Madonna with Two Angels* highlight his serious, spiritual side.

Art fans take Christensen’s work seriously. His paintings are in collections worldwide, and an original can sell for many thousands. *Touching the Hem of God* is being offered for \$39,000; *Sisters of the Sea* can be had for \$64,000.

“Every input we have goes into a card catalog,” Christensen says, pointing at his eyes. “Most of my ideas happen out of things I see around me.” For 30 years he has recorded his visions in sketchbooks; each one (he currently draws in Volume 54) contains 75 to 100 sketches, and one is always at his side—even when attending church, where he can do a “one sermon drawing” in as few as 15 minutes.

This doesn’t mean Christensen isn’t paying attention to whatever life task is at hand. Quite the opposite. Christensen says that drawing while focusing his attention elsewhere frees another part of his brain to work. Books on tape are his favorite diversion; he listens to upward of 60 books a year while painting, and switches to music when each work is ready to refine. “It would be much easier for me to tell you by the end of the day what I’ve listened to than what I’ve painted,” he says.

Christensen studied painting at UCLA and BYU, and refers to his first 10 years out of school as his “I-did-anything-for-a-buck years,” when he worked as a teacher and freelance illustrator. “My artwork was all over the ballpark, [which was] good for an illustrator,” he says. The fantasy stuff, which he had been drawing since a child, was “a guilty pleasure.”

Teaching paid the bills, but Christensen became known as a book cover illustrator, working on projects such as Time-Life Book’s “The Enchanted World Series.”

His big break came in 1985, when the Greenwich Workshop Collection produced a porcelain figurine of a painting he did of Santa Claus. Sales took off, and his prints started moving, too. Today he remains one of only three artists for whom the workshop produces porcelain reproductions.

Christensen, who has taught business practices for artists at BYU, never had a master plan for his own career, and to this extent his art imitates his life.

“I don’t see the painting finished in my head before it’s started,” he says. “The painting reveals itself to me as I go. As I’m working, I know what wants to go there and I fill it in. [But] sometimes my head goes a lot faster than my hands do.”