

Sommer fellowships enhance senior year for exceptional artists

by Ann Haver-Allen

Each year the Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation awards a fellowship to a resident degree senior in the Arts and Letters Program student at Prescott College.

The fellowship was created by the Sommer Foundation to enhance the senior year of one exceptional art student by providing a creative living environment in the Sommer's Mountain Club cabin.

By relieving the fellow of the financial burdens of rent and basic utilities, time is returned for exploration and study. During the senior year, the recipient has full access to the house, which features a north-light studio and a large black and white darkroom.

The fellowship is intended to support the concentration necessary to educate while advocating quality of attention span.

The recipient is chosen through an application process managed by the visual arts faculty at Prescott College, with the final award choice made by the trustees of the Sommer Foundation.

Selection is based on the merit of academic and creative accomplishments. Performers, writers, studio artists, photographers, sculptors, art educators, and art historians are eligible. The fellow is asked to donate an original piece of work created during their fellowship year to the Foundation's collection.

"This fellowship bridges the student artist to the next phase by showing how environment supports and influences creativity," said Naomi Lyons, one of the Sommer trustees. "Fred's home is efficiently sized for living and



Photo by Rachel Yoder
Sam Reed is the 2004 recipient of the Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation Fellowship.



Photo by Maximillian Wahlberg
Maximillian Wahlberg is the 2003 recipient of the Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation Fellowship.

working. His studio is big, simple and has perfect north light while the darkroom is the largest room in the house. Living there invites doing. The student learns to take the time to really look at what he or she is creating and to listen, to himself or herself, in an effort toward becoming their own best audience. Fred said, "We are environment making towards ourselves. Master the advantages."

2004 recipient

Sam Reed, who is majoring in writing and literature, is the recipient of the 2004 Frederick and Frances Sommer Fellowship. Reed hails from the Bay Area in California. He considers himself "incredibly lucky" to be the Sommer Fellow this year.

"This house has been a real boon in the sense that, for the first time, I have a reliable place where I can concentrate on writing without distractions," he said, adding that the

fellowship also represents "affirmation and encouragement, which are invaluable to any growing artist."

"With this comes a great deal of responsibility to take one's work seriously," he added. "This is really the only thing the trustees ask of the fellow."

When Reed is not focusing on his writing, he enjoys "staring out of windows," reading, hiking, running, playing the guitar and bass, looking at birds, and trying to learn Elvish.

"I am currently getting ready to apply to graduate programs in creative writing, with the hope of one day teaching poetry at the college level," he said. "Again, the ability to focus on things like school applications without worrying about rent, utilities, etc. has proven to be a great gift."

2003 recipient

Maximillian Wahlberg was the 2003 Sommer Fellow. His degree from Prescott College

was a double competence in photography and environmental studies, with an emphasis in environmental education. He works with the United States Forest Service as the forest ecologist for the Prescott National Forest.

“My current employment allows me to focus on my professional pursuits in the realm of environmental studies while continuing to enjoy the freedom of photographic expression solely for personal expression,” Wahlberg said.

He said that being the 2003 fellow was a true honor and afforded him a “multitude of opportunities” that otherwise would not have been available.

“While I am confident my photographic aspirations would not have dwindled in the absence of this truly remarkable opportunity, I also know that the fellowship allowed me to pursue the photographic medium in new and rewarding ways,” Wahlberg said.

He said there are three tangible benefits associated with his tenure as a Sommer Fellow. “First, there is a tremendous financial advantage built into the fellowship,” he said. “Eliminating the expense of rent and utilities allowed me to work less and focus more of my attention on my studies and photographic work.

“Secondly, the Sommer Cabin itself afforded me a tremendous environment in which to explore my medium. It provided me both ample space and utility to explore and refine my artistic aspirations.

“Finally, I received tremendous encouragement and support from the Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation. This aspect was particularly meaningful to me, as I had not expected the degree of care and support I received.

“I am forever grateful to the Foundation for affording me this tremendous honor.” 🌱

About Frederick Sommer

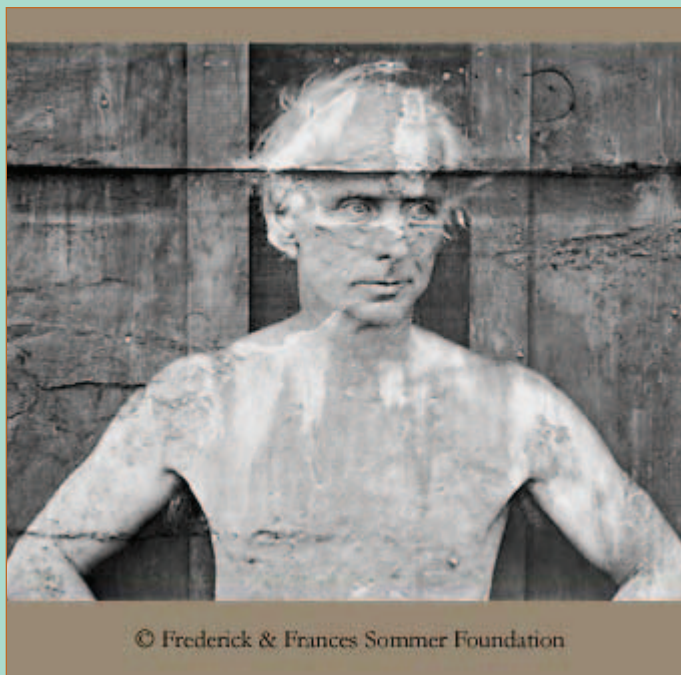
Frederick Sommer was an architect and painter, a philosopher and a photographer, as well as a student of history and living. Born in Italy in 1905 and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Sommer received a master’s degree in landscape architecture from Cornell University, where he had been accepted even though he had no undergraduate degree and was not fluent in English. At Cornell he met his future wife Frances, who was studying mathematics and education.

His serious attempts at photography began after meeting Alfred Stieglitz in 1935, the year he settled permanently in Prescott. Following the advice of Edward Weston, who he met in 1936, Sommer started using an 8-by-10 inch view camera in 1938. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1939 (he already considered himself a citizen of the ‘greater Americas’). He would also develop close friendships with the painters Max Ernst and Charles Sheeler in 1941 and the photographer Aaron Siskind in 1949.

Sommer’s early photographic subjects included chicken entrails, horizonless landscapes of the deserts near Prescott, animal carcasses, and assemblages of found objects and backgrounds. Later his work incorporates his life-long interest in drawing and leads to the creation of synthetic negatives made from paint or smoke, nudes taken in focus and printed out of focus and Cut Paper photographs.

Sommer’s work has been exhibited throughout the world and is in the collection of more than 45 public institutions, including the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Art Institute in Chicago.

He died in January 1999 at his home in Prescott at the age of 93. For more information about Frederick Sommer, or to view some of his work, visit the Sommer Foundation Website at www.FrederickSommer.org.



Frederick Sommer photographed many fellow artists, including Max Ernst seen here.