

Inside this issue



Direction

A Newsletter of the Navy Information Technology Center

[SPAWAR ITC Professional Displays Creative Side](#) -- Introducing Tim Best the Artist

[...exit the newsletter](#)



Columns & Opinion

[Director's Dialogue](#)

The ITC Responds

[Staff Matters](#)

Promotions, Howard retires

[Spotlight](#)

Capt. Valerie Carpenter, USN

[Calendar of events](#)

[Visitors](#)

SPAWAR ITC Professional Displays Creative Side

By Gary Michael Smith
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Information Technology, motorcycles, and art. Not a likely group of interests, but for System Administrator Tim Best it's a perfect combination. It wasn't until I drove up to Boston and dragged back a vintage 1981 Honda CB750K in showroom condition that I met Tim, learned of his interest in motorcycles, and began to explore his art.

First, he is a fellow biker, and one recent weekend we rode together on the twisting hills on the Northshore's Highway 40. Then, I found out about his computer skills and Internet savvy by viewing his Web site. Finally, I discovered he has quite the creative side as a minimalist and neo-conceptualist, working with myriad mediums in a variety of sizes and formats.

As an SES employee and part of the Enterprise Management Team, Tim administers Systems Management Center (SMC) servers for Enterprise Manage-

ment. The administration of the SMC functions includes maintenance of present systems and implementation of new systems for the SMC and the Navy Standard Integrated Personnel System (NSIPS) projects. While serving as the Enterprise Management System Administrator, he also implements the migration of software packages throughout the SPAWAR ITC.

As part of an interview for the *Gulf Coast Arts and Review* periodical, I wanted to interview this artist of German-Irish heritage to learn more about his work and his background. I was intrigued but not surprised to learn that, in addition to having Microsoft



Tim Best

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Tim Best (continued)

Certified Professional certification, Tim also possesses a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago, in addition to having studied Studio Arts at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

Tim admits that the most educational part of this chapter in his budding career was being able to hang out with graduates from the prestigious Art Institute of the Chicago School of Art. "After eight years in Chicago, I was ready for a dramatic change in weather," Tim confides. "I moved to Santa Fé, which is about as different as you can get from Chicago, to let the desert inspire my art."

When it was time for another change in scenery, Tim moved back to Chicago, began working in IT to pay the bills, and then only four months later was transferred to San Diego, California. From there, it was straight to New Orleans. "The art scene here is so vibrant," Tim observes. "I can't think of anywhere else as inspiring as The Big Easy to develop art."

Coming from a creative family, Tim gained an early appreciation of art. "My mom painted a picture of my dad holding me as a napping baby," Tim recollects. "It was an icon of what my dad meant to me."

When asked about influences, Tim admits that his mother is his art mentor. "She's a painter, her style being Organic Abstraction," he explains. He describes her art as both expressive and scientific. "She creates color compositions that 'push' light out instead of reflecting it. She creates spatial composition with color." Other influences include Chicago artists Rodney Carswell, Kerry James Marshall, Phyllis Bramson, Inigo Margolan, Julie Zando, and Tony Tasset—all of whom he respects because they "persevere."

I asked Tim about his favorite mediums. "Anything plastic," he admits. "Clear and shiny mediums, such as glitter, permanent marker, spray paint, enamels, Plexiglas, epoxy resin, and polyester resin work for me because they are translucent." He recollects that at one time he used to paint with oils and would create color composition to radiate light. This evolved to the point where he would use less and less material—further abstracting his art—and more light.

He also recognized the connection that plastics have with popular culture. "Plastics can be molded into anything to look like anything, and can become more real than what they are imitating," he observes. "I think that fits with pop culture because everything is made up but is taken as reality." He compared his art to the "art" of television news, docudramas, or even generic programming. "They are made to catch the audience's attention, which heightens the spectacle while degrading the real value of the medium."

I was curious about his working environment and under what conditions he works best. "A spacious environment, naturally. I particularly appreciate spaces with white walls like galleries and museums for 'installing' my work." Tim describes his "installation" process as everything other than painting to include photography, sculpture, text, etc. He explains that with Installation pieces, he visualizes the work at some point in time, using a journal or sketchbook to log his ideas, then creates the piece in the exhibition space.

"And I create my best work between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m.," Tim reveals. "My mind works with less resistance at this time, and there are probably the fewest possible distractions."

When asked about some of his current projects, Tim tells of a new body of work that

incorporates text with color and elements of drawing. He takes the words out of context and puts them into a painting where they are stripped of everything except their visual elements such as line, scale, and tone. "I'm also using my IT skills to develop a Web site called SiteB Works of Art (www.siteb-art.com) where one can buy works online and view my and my mom's portfolios." He continues, "I also want to create an environment where the art buyers can have a direct dialogue with the artist. I hope this will increase interest in collecting art."

I asked Tim what's on the horizon for him. He admitted that his Web site is taking most of his time at the moment. "I feel it is vitally important. The Internet is like the printing press in that it is creating a revolution characterized by open dissemination of information and ideas."

When asked about outside interests, Tim unsurprisingly admits that "computers" are a passion. "I love them. I like programming because it's a lot like art in that you're putting together components and arranging them to reach a final goal." He also admits to his passion of motorcycling in the country. "It's a great escape and allows my creative juices to flow. I always return from a ride with more ideas for my art. And I also like riding to the track to let it rip! Speed provides a good adrenaline rush."

Naturally, I had to ask Tim for advice to aspiring artists. As with his friends in Chicago, he reiterates "perseverance" as being key. "This is most important for me because as long as I'm creating, things happen. Even though I'm not well known yet, I am getting my work out there little by little, and that's all I can ask of myself right now."