

STUDIO TIME

Three successful artists share inside looks at the workspaces that foster their creativity.

BY NORMAN KOLPAS

What's the secret behind artistic success? Beyond natural-born talent, expert training and dedicated effort, putting together a studio that supports and sustains hard work and provides inspiration can help transform dreams into reality. As demonstrated by these three individuals who've welcomed *Southwest Art* into their personal creative spaces, an ideal studio is as singular as an artist's work.



**ANDREW
BOLAM**

Reno, Nevada



**WHITNEY
GARDNER**

Wonder Valley, California



**ADAM
SMITH**

Manhattan, Montana

DESERT IDYLL

WHITNEY GARDNER

whitofthewest.com



It seems poetically apt that Whitney Gardner paints inside a vintage Airstream trailer. Just like the artist's boldly hyperrealist oils, the studio-on-wheels' gleaming aircraft-grade aluminum surface reflects the landforms and flora of the surrounding Mojave Desert, where she's

lived for the past 14 years. "This little community of Wonder Valley is perfectly named," she says, "because it is full of wonder." Views stretch north to the nearby mountains of the Cleghorn Lakes Wilderness, featured in her recent oil *A PLACE CALLED HOME*; west more than 50 miles to 11,503-foot-tall Mount San Geronio; and just south to the Pinto Mountains along the northeastern boundary of Joshua Tree National Park.

Parked "maybe 50 yards" from her home in a comfortably remodeled one-room "jackrabbit homestead" cabin originally built for a 1950s government land-claim settler, the refurbished trailer's interior has been stripped of any original camping amenities. That leaves, one might say, a blank canvas for Gardner's creative needs. She says, "The lighting is wonderful because it's a small space surrounded by lots of tiny windows, and I have my easel set up under one of the skylights. I don't really paint at night." The BFA graduate of Oakland's California College of the Arts, who professionally debuted with a sold-out solo show just five years ago, finds the compact space ideal for focusing her creative energy—and even venturing into larger formats. "I'd always worked in fairly intimate sizes," she remarks. "But even though I have to crouch through the door and can reach up and touch the ceiling, since I've moved in, I've painted some of the largest works I've ever done."

Gardner's work can be found at Medicine Man Gallery in Tucson, Arizona; and at McLarry Fine Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



ABOVE AND RIGHT Gardner's vintage Airstream studio.



MUSIC OF THE CANVAS

"I love listening to music when I'm painting, but I'm really picky. Sometimes, I ask the painting, 'What do you feel like today?' I listen to folk music a lot—Bob Dylan, Barbara Dane, Townes Van Zandt—because I love storytelling," Gardner says. "And, for whatever reason, when I'm painting flowers, I'll play classic jazz like John Coltrane or Thelonious Monk."

When creating a work of art, Gardner has notes and sketches as reference.

SOME DON'T LIKE IT HOT

She says, "There's a mini cooling-heating unit attached to the wall, and it works most of the year. But this summer, it was about 118 degrees for five days straight, so I had to move my easel into the cabin for a week."



Whitney Gardner, *A Place Called Home*, oil on panel, 36 x 36.

WORK/STORAGE SPACE

"Since this space is so small, when I'm done with paintings, I just set them against a wall," Gardner explains. "When I'm working on a show, I can easily see all the paintings for it, understand their color harmonies and cross-reference what worked."

HYDRATION STATION

Gardner shares, "In the desert, it's essential to stay hydrated. When I'm painting, I'll keep a gallon bottle of water right near my feet, so when I roll back in my chair from the easel, I'm going to hit it and be reminded to take a drink."