

# Introduction

BY **RANDY ASTLE** | WEB: **RANDYASTLE.COM**

*Randy Astle earned his master's degree from the London Film School and currently works as a children's television writer in Manhattan. His scholarly work has helped create the field of Mormon film studies, and his 2007 article "A History of Mormon Cinema" was recently named one of the ten best articles in the fifty-year history of BYU Studies.*

*He created an online social network for Mormon artists in New York City at <http://nyldsan.ning.com> and another for all LDS filmmakers at <http://ldsfilmmakersnetwork.ning.com>.*

When I first learned about *Mormon Artist* magazine, I immediately thought about all of the LDS artists here in New York who ought to be profiled in its pages. I wanted to contribute an interview but knew so many spectacular artists that I couldn't decide which to propose to the editors, so I finally proposed doing an entire issue about Mormon artists in New York City. Ben Crowder enthusiastically agreed and graciously allowed me to guest edit this issue of *Mormon Artist*, the first issue in the magazine's short history dedicated exclusively to artists in a single location.

New York City has always been among the artistic capitals of the United States, and since at least the turn of the last century, it has drawn its share of LDS artists to study, teach, work, and live in its five boroughs. Most people interested in Mormon art associate the city with names like Mahonri Young and Minerva Teichert, yet a host of other artists followed, drawn here by the city's intellectual life and vibrant artistic culture. Besides those who have lived here, a great many more have visited to partake of New York's culture or give an exhibition or performance themselves.

Today, with a temple on Broadway right across the street from the largest performing arts center in the country, there are likely as many, if not more, Mormon artists working in New York than in any other city in the world. In fact, even with an entire issue at our disposal, we still didn't have room to include even

a fraction of the individuals we felt merited attention. Mormon artists here have performed lead roles in shows like *Les Misérables* and *La Bohème*; performed at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, jazz clubs, and venues for new music; and had work acquired by the MoMA, Metropolitan Museum, and a host of other institutions, here and throughout the world. Their work stretches from Super Bowl commercials to *This American Life*, from modern dance companies to preschool television — and on and on. As Mormon art experiences a form of renaissance, New York City is destined to be at the center of much of it.

None of this is to discount the artistic work that's going on in other areas of high LDS concentration, and obviously great Mormon artists live everywhere — indeed, the geographic dispersion of contemporary artists is one of the things that makes the present moment in Mormon art and letters so exciting. But it's also satisfying to recognize a sort of modern-day gathering to certain places, and New York is certainly one of those. As one of our interviewees recently said to me, if Mormon artists have aspirations to be among the greatest in their fields, then they should live in a place that constantly forces them to prove it; New York City does just that. Please enjoy learning about the artists profiled here, a fantastic group of talented individuals who represent just a sampling of what this city has to offer. ■