



CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY OF PLACE

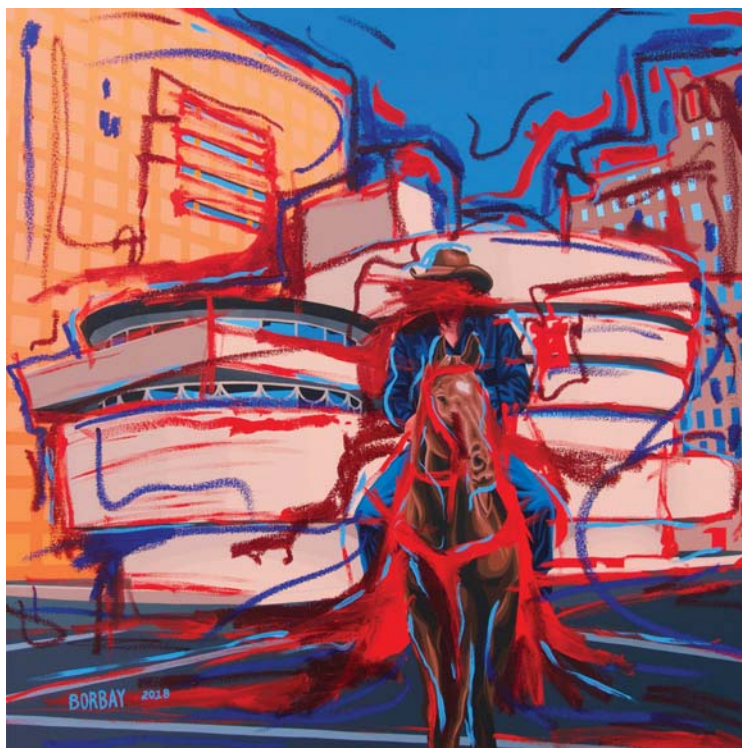
Borbay's take on location painting is compelling, vivid and varied.

by Jenn Rein

Borbay is committed. Every year for the past 12 years, the artist has laid the visage of the Guggenheim down on canvas, honoring Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural masterpiece. As a location painter who seeks to release the unheard voice of a structure, this ongoing project best captures the development of his work over time. Each year's effort is unique in style, allowing the viewer to perceive the context of this familiar design in unexpected ways.

A former resident of New York City, Borbay's attachment to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is symbolic of his love for architecture in general, but the decision to use it as his subject for over a decade is happenstance. "I passed the Guggenheim daily on my way to Central Park," he admits. The simple act of regular exposure eventually compelled him to plant his easel across the street.

As Borbay painted, friends and family often stopped by to check his progress. This included his brother Tim, who was given specific instructions by the artist. "I told him to walk by every 15 minutes and declare, 'I must have this canvas!'" the artist says, laughing. Joking and familial subterfuge aside, one couple on a visit from Milan expressed interest. Lacking a business card, Borbay offered his contact information on a piece of palette paper. A sale was made.



LEFT
Guggenheim 10
acrylic and oil stick
on canvas, 30x30

FAR LEFT
Pink Guggenheim
acrylic on canvas,
30x30

“My job is to compartmentalize and establish intent.”

— BORBAY

One year later, the artist craved another opportunity to depict the iconic building. True to his nature to follow his passions, one more time could not be enough. He instead made a 20-year commitment to his Guggenheim project. Currently 12 years into the series, it has proven to be an honest and fascinating glimpse of an evolving artistic voice.

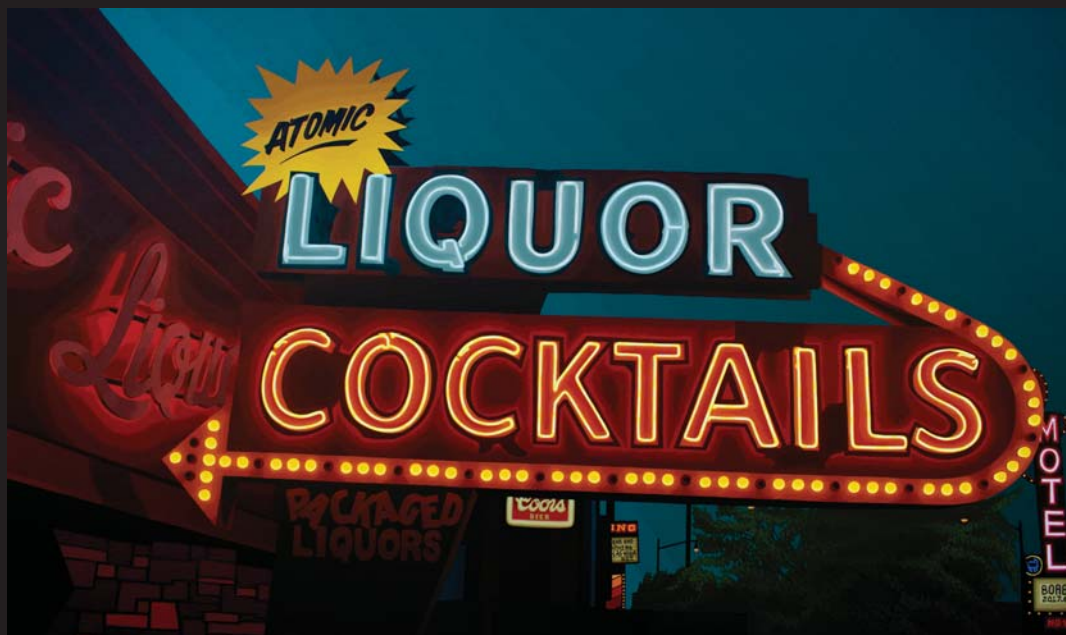
SHAPING INTENTION

Borbay grew up on Long Island and was heavily influenced by his artist mother. He found himself sketching from an early age. “Ever since I could pick up a pencil, I’ve been crazy about art,” he says. His signature move in elementary school was to illustrate his book reports, if only to garner a higher grade. His skills eventually landed him in an advanced placement art class as a freshman in high school.

By the time he was college-bound, he was accepted to multiple art schools based on his sketchbook submissions alone, but Borbay had other goals. His dream was to become a track runner in a Division I team, and an athletic scholarship to Boston University enabled him to do so. Art didn’t completely take a backseat, however. “I took all of the core classes for two years: sculpture, printmaking, drawing, painting, photography. I came out with a graphic design degree.” The artist set off, in 2003, into a challenging job market. “The economy was heading toward a bust,” says Borbay. “Even an MBA graduate couldn’t get a job at Blockbuster.”

This is an artist who worked in front of the cameras on a reality show local to Boston. He tried his hand at stand-up comedy. He filled the role of graphic designer at a newspaper, worked in financing and licensing for a property magnate, and excelled at recruiting creatives to service brands such as Calvin Klein and Coach.





Painting Light

After several cross-country trips, Borbay found himself entranced by the colorful vintage neon signs scattered across the national landscape and decided he wanted to paint them. "I'm a sucker for Americana and, for me, neon signs have always been romantic," he says. "They're beautiful, they glow, they have their own personality, they're always in a state of motion and they're never boring."

Before starting a neon painting, Borbay takes photos of the signs in daylight to get information about the structure of his subject. He then returns at night to see what the sign looks like when lit, "trying to capture the essence versus the actual," he says. He's not concerned about exact accuracy, but would rather the painting capture the feeling.



CLOCKWISE FROM
OPPOSITE TOP
Radio City
acrylic on Belgian linen,
60x60

Atomic Liquors
acrylic on canvas, 36x60

The Mint Bar
acrylic on canvas, 20x20

Ashes Motel
acrylic on canvas, 48x48



LEFT
When Gary Met Jerry
 acrylic on canvas,
 40x40

OPPOSITE
The Dude
 acrylic and collage on
 canvas, 24x24

commissions for this genre continue to serve the core of his practice. The artist will take multiple photographic studies of a building in order to gauge not only the architectural balance but the mood as well. With comparisons established that define both lighting and structure, he then becomes better able to render the subject.

Between his inherent penchant for sketching and his graphic design background, Borbay's skill set at the canvas continued to evolve, particularly in terms of draftsmanship. Freehand sketching the majority of a piece, he also tapes off some of the lines when the acrylic is finally being applied. Yet the result isn't so clinical that it has no personality—and that's the point. "My job is to compartmentalize and establish intent," he explains.

Depending on his own personal takes, as well as the collaborative nature of the commission process, elements of style emerge from the canvas that are special to the subject. These vivid pieces make up a whole that's as compelling as it is imaginative. The connectivity lies in color and energy, and sometimes, cowboys.

When Borbay chooses his own subject, as he did for *When Gary Met Jerry* (above), the theme is highlighted by his personal ties to place. In this piece, a response to his own experience as a New York transplant in the American West, Borbay presents the New York diner that was featured in the TV series *Seinfeld* as a backdrop to Gary Cooper as a character from the 1940 film *The Westerner*. "It's really just about coming from New York City to cowboy country," says the artist. "It's kind of a nice marriage."

His use of color in these neon punctuated works isn't chosen arbitrarily or even lightly, "When you live with

Peaking in his corporate work as business director for a front-end design and development company, Borbay found himself splitting time between New York City and Stockholm, Sweden. While vacationing in Maui with his girlfriend (now wife) Erin, he found himself sated by the environment." I was on the beach drinking a beer, sampling amazing produce and painting—all while surrounded by a light mist."

He grabbed onto the moment. "I realized that although I'd been advising people to follow their dreams, I wasn't taking that advice myself." Borbay quit his job on July 2, 2009—a day he now refers to as his Independence Day—and has been painting full-time ever since.

A FULL-TIME ARTIST

Borbay's galvanizing moment launched him into quick success. While it's true that some artists shy away from the public relations aspect of their work, it's also true that some are uniquely prepared for the challenge. Borbay's background in net-working has served him well, and his marketing instincts shifted into high gear with ease. Adopting the name Borbay as a matter of brand identity (his given name is Jason Thomas Borbet) is just one example of his fully formed approach to promotion.

At the outset, many of the connections Borbay fostered through his corporate work expressed interest in his location paintings. He developed a successful portfolio of work, and

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—BORBAY

a work and see it outside of the fixed lighting of a gallery, you experience the depth and mood of a piece in a way like no other.” He wants his clients to spend time taking in the movement on the canvas. This can allow for surprises in the work to continually surface. “This series of paintings, in low lighting, feels alive in a way that’s different. They glow,” he says.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PORTRAITURE

While still living in New York, Borbay started a series of portraits created with *New York Post* headlines, depicting faces tied to current events. The portraits included actual words from the headlines overlaid on the subject.

The artist has developed this idea into a deeply personal, collaborative

experience. He starts by interviewing the subject, “as if writing a book report,” he explains. “The portrait should tell a life story.” He takes up to 700 photos of one face, and the process doesn’t stop there. “I have them send me pictures of their own. It all has to come together with words, face, image and body. Every detail is heavily curated,” he says.





TOP TO BOTTOM

Dr. Schattner
acrylic and collage on
canvas, 30x30

Bene
acrylic and collage on
Belgian linen, 30x30

Although the artist left New York five years ago, the portrait work hasn't slowed. In 2020, he completed *Bene* (bottom left), a portrait of one of his golfing buddies who lives in the same mountain town in Idaho that Borbay now calls home. "The photos in Bene's shirt are carefully curated snapshots of his entire life," Borbay says. "If someone discovered this portrait in 100 years, and had no idea who Bene was, this montage would convey a vivid story."

This collaboration on what Borbay likes to call "anthropological portraiture" means subject and artist must come to an agreement on composition, color palette and tonality. Further details, integral to the piece, require deep discussion along the way. Understanding the conditions for successful collaboration includes understanding the art of negotiation. Again, Borbay's pragmatic skills that served so well in corporate environments are fully at play.

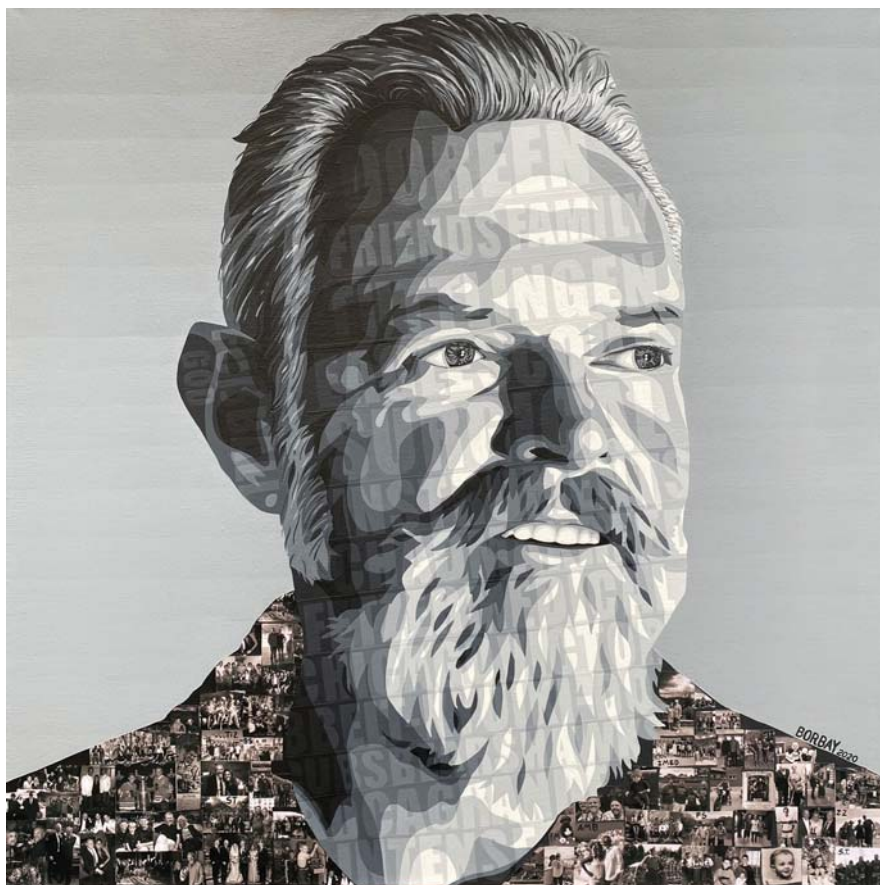
At this stage, the portraits have become an integral part of his portfolio. "I'm basically striking a balance between the location work and the portraiture," says the artist.

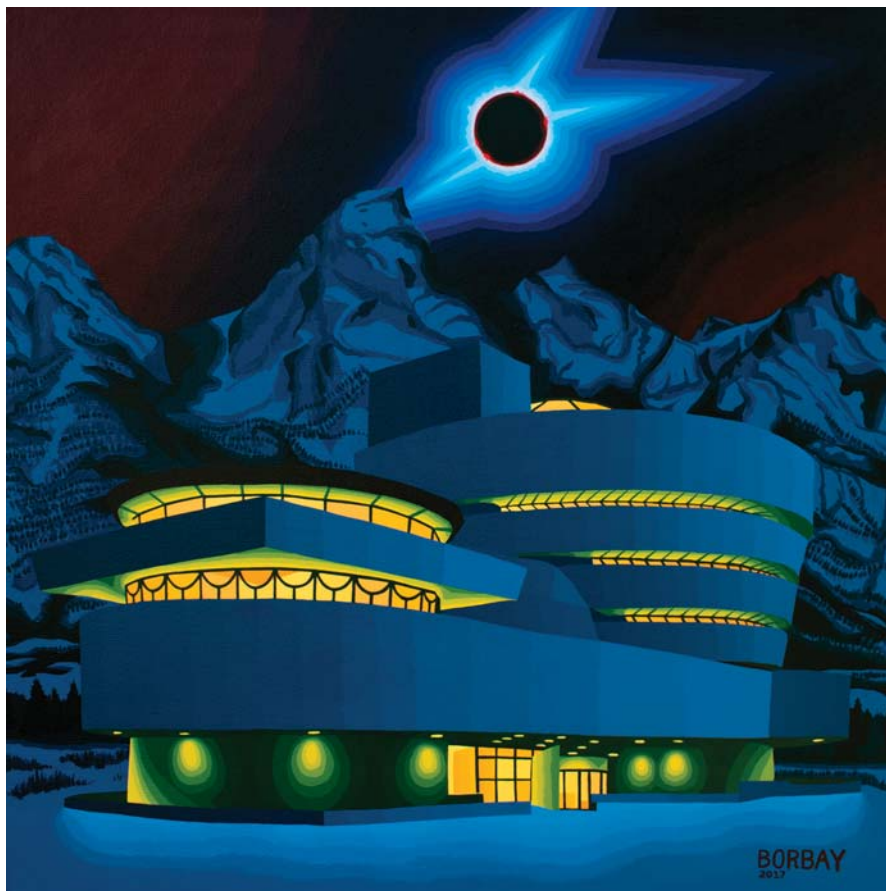
SIGN OF THE TIMES

During the past year, pandemic protocols often placed Borbay—now a father of three—in a balancing act of keeping an ear open for his children while working in his home studio. "It's just the time we're living in," he says.

For year 12 in his *Guggenheim* series, he chose to reflect the chaos of 2020 in his own way. Working within the set parameters of structure but allowing for the deep variables that set each rendering apart, Borbay painted *Pandemic Guggenheim* (opposite) using his nondominate left hand. He executed the full work with a palette knife.

As he faces the second half of his two-decade project, the personal nature of his work comes through with better clarity. The importance





TOP TO BOTTOM
Guggenheim 10
 acrylic and oil stick on
 canvas, 30x30

**Pandemic
 Guggenheim**
 acrylic on canvas,
 30x30

of evolving as an artist isn't limited to the work being accomplished. Unexpected choices that change the course of a life plan serve to shape the artistic voice as well.

"When you're young, you have this idea about what you think you're going to do. If you had told me years ago that I would be a father of three and living in Idaho, there's no way I would have believed that." And yet, the artist feels he's very much at home.

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MEET THE ARTIST

On July 2, 2009, Borbay (borbay.com) declared independence from a successful career at an international design firm to follow his dream of becoming a full-time, self-represented artist. Through branding, social media and relentless creative development, Borbay built his art market free of the gallery model. His work ranges in subject matter from neon signs to city- and landscapes to portraiture. Following a decade in Manhattan, the artist relocated to Victor, Idaho, with his wife and children in 2016.

Portrait of the Artist
 acrylic on canvas, 30x30



Turn the page for
 a demonstration.

PAINTING PROCESS: LARGE-SCALE LANDSCAPE



STAGE 1 To start this large painting of New York's Central Park (roughly 4x4½ feet), I first blocked in the main shapes. I like to deconstruct an image to its most essential forms.

STAGE 2 A warm underpainting activates the surface color. In this case, I underpainted the sky, the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir and the Hudson River.

STAGE 3 With a canvas this large, taking the time to block out more essential shapes was mandatory—and required a great deal of patience.

STAGE 4 By this stage the majority of the major forms had been identified and established.

STAGE 5 Then the fun began! I painted in the Upper West Side and identified light on the Great Lawn.

STAGE 6 Bob Ross painted happy trees—I painted a few hundred with thousands of leaves on this canvas, à la Seurat.

FINAL *Central Park* (opposite) is the result of the reconstruction of a complex composition from two basic red and orange shapes. 🍷

Central Park
acrylic and collage elements
on canvas, 48x56

