

L Dimensions of living

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Artistic transformation

Former Smithtown running star, Trump marketer carves his niche, builds successful business out of NYC studio; Bahamas exhibit next on agenda

By JENNIFER EYRING

When Jason Borbet was a toddler, he sat in his Nesconset home painting wooden rabbits with his mom.

Now in his Manhattan studio, he creates paintings of celebrities and city landscapes under his pseudonym Borbay.

But Mr. Borbet didn't go straight from animals to A-listers. He was a track star at Smithtown High School and went to Boston University on an athletic scholarship, where he studied graphic design.

And, after admittedly sleeping through most of his classes and letting track run his life, he graduated and became an assistant designer in Boston. He soon gave that up to become a low-budget television reality star for a show called *The Roomies* for a year before moving to New York City and trying to make a career as a stand-up comedian.

When that didn't work out, he landed what many would view as a dream job: an advertising position with the Trump Organization. But after a few years, he chose to go back to his roots and trust his artistic instincts, where his true passion lied.

"I remember telling my mom, 'Hey, you know how the economy's going south? I'm going to quit my six-figure advertising job and I'm going to go become an artist,'" Mr. Borbet said. "She looked at me like I was insane."

Yet, despite their concern, his parents Kathie and Steve Borbet knew they had to support their son.

"It was probably one of the hardest things to hear as a parent because your son is making a lot of money being very creative... and then he was going to give it all up to become an artist," Mrs. Borbet said. "As a parent, you always want your child to have the best and safest, but that's their life so we had to be really supportive."

So Mr. Borbet dropped everything and created a new identity for himself: Borbay. He chose this name, mostly, he said because the website borbet.com was already taken. He also did it because people had trouble saying his name, which is pronounced the way his pseudonym is.

"Despite the fact that there's Manet, Monet and Courbet in the lexicon of art," he said, "nobody knows how to pronounce my name."

The origins of Mr. Borbet's artistic style were partly a result of unforeseen circumstances after breaking his leg playing hockey and being forced to remain in his apartment.

"I was 28 years old and I had a 3-month time-out



BORBAY: Jason Borbet, a Nesconset native, gave up his career to become a painter and took on the pseudonym Borbay. He now creates paintings of celebrities and city landscapes out of his Manhattan studio.

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-Derek Van Oss photo

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Passion drives artist to follow his dreams

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from my life," he said.

However, it was during this time-out Mr. Borbet found the inspiration for his Borbay collage style.

While reading the newspaper one day, Mr. Borbet noticed all of the different stories and became interested in trying to capture one day's news in a picture. This eventually evolved into "Borbay" taking clips of headlines he's saved and using them as the background for celebrity portraits he creates.

"When I start a portrait," he said, "I build a big pile of headlines that might make sense in an obvious and less obvious way," he said.

Mr. Borbet has painted portraits of many different celebrities, from Johnny Depp and Michael Jackson to former Yankee Robinson Cano and tennis star Serena Williams. He usually doesn't meet the people he paints; however, he was able to meet Serena Williams during a charity event, where his painting of her sold for \$14,000.

Mr. Borbet also creates paintings of different city buildings and landscapes that inspire him, and he's currently in the midst of a 20-year project to paint portraits of the Guggenheim Museum once a year every year, and then feature these pieces in the museum.

"I don't think I'll live long enough to paint the things I'm inspired to paint," he said, "which is pretty much everything."

Mr. Borbet shares his entire artistic process from start to finish on his website borbay.com. Visitors can see every step of a painting and the little highlights the artist adds to make otherwise-unnoticed details become eye-popping.

"Sometimes I have a very clear vision, and some paintings are just magic—they just work from start to finish," he said. "Other paintings are like smashing your head against the wall and you get nowhere. I've had everything in between."

Mr. Borbet said, aside from his mom, his biggest inspiration to become an artist was Christine Hynes Livesey, his Advanced Placement Art teacher at Smithtown High School. Although he was only in his first year of high school

and AP classes are usually reserved for older students, Mr. Borbet was able to weasel his way into the class as a freshman.

"I walked over from the ninth-grade center [which is now Accomsett Middle School] as a pre-pubescent 4-foot-11 kid with a huge mouth—which I still have—and I talked my way into the class," he said.

Mr. Borbet said Ms. Hynes Livesey pushed her students and made them believe that art wasn't just an extracurricular activity—it was a lifestyle. "She inspired students to a degree that I have never seen on any level since," he said.

Aside from becoming a successful artist, Mr. Borbet is also a husband and father. He married his wife, Erin, an acupuncturist, in 2011. Their first daughter, Coraline, was born in 2013, and Erin gave birth to their second daughter, Vega, less than a month ago.

As a father, Mr. Borbet said he has less time to paint but that it doesn't bother him. He now just does what Ms. Hynes Livesey told him to do all those years ago: "Spend more time looking and less time painting."

Thanks to his own tenacity and business sense, Mr. Borbet has done most of his own publicity to create a network of collectors. His pieces are now hanging in houses and businesses all over the world.

"It's amazing," he said. "It's cool to know that there's this machine already in effect and it's going to keep going beyond my lifespan."

All of Mr. Borbet's pieces can be viewed on borbay.com or by following him on Instagram and Twitter @borbay. To purchase a piece or to visit his East 20th Street studio, contact Mr. Borbet at Jason@borbay.com.

Mr. Borbet's next plan is to start an Artist-in-Residence program at the Grand Isle Resort on Great Exuma in the Bahamas, aiming to kick off an art festival called Art Exuma in late 2015. He and his family will live in the Bahamas during April and May and spend the rest of the year planning Art Exuma. If all goes well, Mr. Borbet said his daughters might spend the first few years of their lives in the Bahamas.

Despite her early concerns, Kathie Borbet said she and her husband always knew their son would excel.

"Whatever Jason chose to do in

life, he would do it 100 percent," Mrs. Borbet said. "That's how he's faced everything in life, so we knew he would be successful."



SUMMER PROGRAM OPEN HOUSE: Sweetbriar Nature Center, located at 62 Eckernkamp Drive in Smithtown, will offer children and parents an opportunity to tour its facility and learn about the many summer programs available at a free Open House Saturday, March 7 from noon to 4 p.m. Families will be able to tour the rain forest and also meet some of the resident animals, including Sweetbriar's baby possum. The Program Director will be available to answer any questions and refreshments will be served. For additional information, call 631-979-6344 or visit sweetbriarnc.org.

Gearing up for spring yard sale, seek donations for fundraiser

Sweetbriar Nature Center in Smithtown seeks donations for its annual yard sale set for Saturday and Sunday, April 25 and 26. All money raised goes to support the center's mission of providing wildlife rehabilitation and nature education to Long Island residents. Items wanted include collectibles, antiques, hand made items, paintings and sculptures small pieces of furniture under 30 pounds. Everything must be in good condition. If you are interested in donating items or helping at the yard sale, call Eric Young at 631-979-6344, ext. 302 or e-mail eyswbriarnc@aol.com. For more information on Sweetbriar, visit sweetbriarnc.org.

