

Joe Burns



Joe Burns worked as a freelance graphic designer for more than 15 years, doing projects for packaged goods companies, along with corporate logos and other marketing communications design and branding work. But in 2006, inspired by his love of master world portrait painters like John Singer Sargent and renowned artists such as Jeffrey T. Larson, plein air painter Scott Lloyd Anderson and others, Burns went back to school for four years -- painting seven hours daily at The Atelier Studio Program of Fine Arts in Minneapolis. He studied primarily under Dale Redpath and Cyd Walker, who were students of Richard Lack.

"Although the Atelier elevated my ability to draw and paint, what I really learned there was how to see, and then how to interpret on canvas what people believe they are seeing," Burns says of the legendary school with roots in 19th century French Impressionism. "That is really a painter's goal with any subject matter, I believe. The artist's job is to convince viewers of their work; that those dabs and brush strokes of color on canvas are really something else!"

With a handful of exhibits under his belt, Burns gained more notoriety in the summer of 2013 after painting 57 portraits of neighbors. As a 17-year block captain, he thought, "It would help me to get to know my neighbors even better and serve as a good gesture in community building."

Working three-to-four hours on each neighborly portrait it was the ultimate way to make a connection. But he's also had a less artistic, more altruistic purpose: "The best thing for me was to get to spend four hours with everyone on the block. You never know where a portrait, or a conversation, is going to lead you."

For his exhibition *Canvassing the Bakken Oil Fields*, Burns spent over a month in North Dakota taking four separate trips to Williston, Watford City and driving countless rural roads painting on-site and taking photos. While on site he met numerous people working on drills, in machine shops, in the bars and restaurants and for the local utilities. After working in the field, Burns went to work in his studio to develop large-scale paintings, some as large as 52x28 and 76x19. This is where he met and painted the portrait of The Oil Man.

Joe works out of his studio above the garage in Southwest, Minneapolis neighborhood, where he lives with his wife Kris. His studio is always open to visitors, and currently he is working on his next show called *Facing America*, a collection of portraits of immigrants and their stories of coming to the land of opportunity.