



Matthew Clay Baumgardner

February 5, 1955 - November 20, 2018

Matthew Clay Baumgardner, an internationally-collected artist, passed away at age 63 in Travelers Rest, South Carolina on November 20, 2018.

Matt was born in Columbus, Ohio, on February 5, 1955. He commenced his professional career in the 1970s, while studying under South Carolina artists Carl Blair, Emery Bopp, and Darell Koons at Bob Jones University. In 1982, Matt earned his MFA in Painting from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was advised by Peter Plagens. Matt's study of art history manifested in the curation of his extensive art library. His collection included books about artists who influenced the development of his unique artistic vision, such as ancient Egyptians, Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Jackson Pollock, Brice Marden, Cy Twombly, Robert Ryman, Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, James Turrell, Robert Irwin, and Alfred Jensen.

In 1983, at age 28, Matt moved to New York City, where he lived and worked until 2006. There, Matt met and married his (now-ex) wife and raised their four daughters—Zoe, Eva, Lila, and Sofi (whom he fondly referred to in the collective as “ZELS”). Sharing his NYC studio with his daughters while they created artwork to their favorite music while he painted were Matt's most treasured memories. He enjoyed taking care of their home on Second Street in the East Village, filling it with dozens of plants, bright colors and loud patterns, handmade furniture, music, movies, and artwork. Matt's daughters lovingly remember his crooked smile and deep voice, his playfulness and childlike soul, his charisma and deep emotional sensitivity, his creativity and knowledge of art, and his eye for beauty in everything.

It was in his NYC studios that the majority of Matt's body of artwork was created. His archives from this period include paintings and works on paper in all scales, from the abstract expressionist pieces bursting with the electric energy of the 1980's NYC art scene to his reductive work beginning in the late 1990s, which reflected appreciation of the grid and urban landscape. In 1993, Matt was awarded a national Visual Arts Fellowship in Painting by the National Endowment for the Arts for his birch plywood series, representing

the beginning of his signature technique of embedded glyphs in multiple layers of pigmented gypsum. During his 22-year tenure in NYC, Matt's artwork was exhibited in 14 solo and more than 30 group shows, including at internationally-recognized galleries such as Charles Cowles (New York), Edward Thorp (New York), Jeffrey Coploff (New York), Wessel O'Connor (New York), Bentley (Scottsdale), Carrie Secrist (Chicago), LewAllen Contemporary Art (Santa Fe), and Galerie Marie-Louise Wirth (Zurich, Switzerland).

In 2006, Matt relocated to rural Travelers Rest, SC, where he designed and built a live/work studio on an acre of land in 2009, a serene haven in which he created his work until his death. Approaching the studio, one was greeted by "Aslan," a lion statue named for a character created by Matt's favorite author, C.S. Lewis. More comfortable in his studio than any other setting, Matt welcomed an eclectic array of people of all ages and walks of life. Visitors were impressed by his exceptional organizational skills, most vividly illustrated by shelves of cans containing his "master mixes" of custom colors, art tools, and jars of pigments, but also evidenced in creative storage of functional items. Always rooted in faith, it was here that Matt found and anchored to Emmet Fox's daily spiritual meditations, *Around the Year*. His friends fondly remember how each day he aligned himself to Emmet's writings as a springboard to his beliefs, a strength he shared with anyone who visited the studio. Since returning to the Carolinas, Matt's work has been exhibited in a major solo retrospective at the Greenville County Museum of Art and at other venues, including Art San Diego, Spectrum Miami, and Forré & Co. Fine Art (Aspen and Vail).

Encouraging others to express themselves through art was one of Matt's hallmarks. His first job after college was teaching art; years later, in 2013-2014, he volunteered to teach adolescents at The Whitehorse Academy. Framed artwork by his daughters, nieces, and nephews graced his studio, and he enjoyed gifting art supplies to them as well as his friends' children. His donations to Tigerville Elementary School, which provided him with recycled cans for mixing paint, were earmarked for the purchase of art supplies.

Matt's love of nature and its four elements permeated his life and art. Inspecting insects with his microscope, tending to his garden laden with flowers and edible plants, swimming with his daughters in the Caribbean or exercising in the pool at his studio, lighting fireworks or burning a pile of pruned branches on his grounds, contemplating clouds and beautiful sunsets, and touring country roads shirtless in his yellow supercharged Honda S2000 convertible were simple joys that inspired his work. In addition, Matt traveled on currents of good music, movies, and conversation. There was a constant stream running through his mind and studio. Anyone lucky enough to deep-dive with Matt was transported and transformed. He was always jotting down insights or possible titles for his work on

little slips of paper, inspired by a good song or movie scene or heart-to-heart conversation.

Matt often remarked how he started painting because he “needed to.” On his artist bio he wrote, “Since very early childhood, I have loved creating Noumena (things unto themselves) that engage and heal me.” Always deeply spiritual, Matt articulated, embraced, and expressed transcendent issues through his art:

“My work imparts a transformative experience that resonates with my longings to channel universal and spiritual planes; I want to transport the spirit, to remind us all that we are perfect beings passing through a transient world. My soul craves expression through poetic and timeless art that beckons the viewer to return time and again to find renewal and fresh experiences.”

Matt believed our time on Earth is ephemeral and only a small part of our existence. As he wrote in a letter to his daughter, “We were never born, nor will we ever die. Thus, we are ageless and timeless spiritual creatures of substance.”

Matt is survived by his four beloved daughters, Zoe Klee Reinsch and husband Johnny Reinsch, and Eva Evans, Lila Joy, and Sofi Clare Baumgardner; mother Mary Lou Baumgardner; sister Emily Wirth Borello; nieces Jennifer Rose, Annie, and Amanda Borello; brother-in-law David Thorne and nephews Clay and Jacob Thorne. He is predeceased by his father, Alan Wirth Baumgardner (2009), sister, Jennifer M. Thorne (2013), and Frank Borello (2018). In addition to his family, Matt will be deeply missed by all those whose spirits and hearts he touched, especially his dearest friends Riley Murphy, Russell Biles, and Jim Pitt Harris; children and adolescents he mentored and taught; and artists, collectors, and others in the art world.

Today, Matt’s timeless artwork endures, found in public and private collections, and on his website www.baumgardnerart.com and Instagram account [@mattbaumgardnerart](https://www.instagram.com/mattbaumgardnerart). His Travelers Rest studio continues to make his archives available to collectors, gallerists, designers, and curators.

A Celebration of Life tribute is planned for Matt in Travelers Rest on March 23, 2019 at 1:30 pm in the courtyard at Hotel Domestique, a collector and venue for viewing his artwork.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to:

Chris & Kelly Hope Foundation

c/o Community Foundation of Greenville
630 E. Washington Street, Suite A
Greenville, SC 29601

The Family Effect
(designated for Whitehorse Academy)
1400 Cleveland Street
Greenville, SC 29607
Online donations: www.familyeffect.org

Comments



“ What an amazing artist in every breath of life, your passion and zest for life is sorely by us all. Many beautiful moments my dearest friend and may peace hold a comfort your soul, as always Erika

erika haynie - February 06 at 09:43 PM



“ I'm so sorry to hear about Matt's passing. He and I were friends in high school and became reacquainted about a year ago. My sincere condolences to Matt's family.

Diane Haddad - February 05 at 08:36 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Diane Haddad - February 04 at 05:06 PM



“ Truth is within; it takes no rise
From outward things, what'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception -- which is truth.

A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and to know,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.

---- Robert Browning, "Paracelsus." Part 1

Peter Kelsey - February 04 at 02:50 PM



“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



The Wood Mortuary - January 30 at 07:42 AM



“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



The Wood Mortuary - January 26 at 03:45 PM



“ 43 files added to the album Memories Album



The Wood Mortuary - January 24 at 01:20 PM