

Artist William Quigley at his East Hampton studio.  
Photo credit: Eileen Kotak.



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—WILLIAM QUIGLEY

# STROKES OF GENIUS

By  
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*East Hampton artist **William Quigley** reveals the colorful truth about celebrity, success and what's next*

If you drive down a hidden alleyway past a few vintage gas pumps, oil trucks and fuel tanks, you'll find what looks like an ordinary garage. But, behind the doors of this unassuming space is William Quigley's East Hampton art studio, where museum-worthy paintings live and breathe creative genius into every corner of the room.

Quigley, 55, meets us dressed in a baseball cap, jeans and a T-shirt of his own design. He politely offers to help *Luxury Living* staffers with their very heavy camera and lighting equipment. As we enter the studio, the scene is colorfully chaotic, with cans of brushes, tubes of paint, buckets and scraps of paper surrounding us. "All the painting takes place here," he explains. "I can't paint at my house or I'll wreck it."

So who is William Quigley? He has been called many things: contemporary artist, portrait painter, cultural catalyst, fashion designer, philanthropist and soon-to-be film and reality TV star. However, to understand his rise in the art world, you have to go back to where it all began.

## BRUSH WITH GREATNESS

In the 1980s, after completing the bachelor of fine arts program at Philadelphia College of Art, Quigley studied sculpture, painting and printmaking at the Tyler School of Art in Rome, followed by a continued study of political science and art at the University of Pennsylvania. In

1985, he was barely out of college when Henry S. McNeil, owner of the McNeil Gallery in Philadelphia, launched Quigley's career by showcasing his work in the back room of Andy Warhol's "Images of a Child's World" exhibit, one of Warhol's last shows before his untimely death in 1987.

Quigley moved to New York City in 1986 to obtain his masters of fine arts degree at Columbia University. At the time, he began trading paintings with artists Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring and Willem de Kooning. It wasn't long before Quigley began hanging out with Warhol. "Andy didn't talk. He was so quiet," he says of the reclusive icon.

Yet, Quigley is exceptionally talkative and in the mood to take a trip down memory lane. He disappears for a moment and comes back with treasured relics from his storied past: a copy of "Andy Warhol's Children's Book," a Warhol sketch, a genuine Warhol polaroid and a 1973 issue of *Interview Magazine*—all signed gifts from Warhol to Quigley. "These are really special," he says beaming with pride.

## SUCCESS IS GOOD

From U.S. presidents and rock stars to actors and sports legends, Quigley has made a name for himself painting celebrity portraits that command attention and high market prices. The question soon arises if success really matters when it comes to making great art. Quigley insists





William Quigley stands beside "What's your interpretation of history?," 2016, oil, collage, pencil, acrylic on Belgian linen 74 x74". Photo credit: Eileen Kotak.

that it does. "Success is good. I never feel successful. I am after the same thing everyone else is after. I'm a capitalist," he says. "I really think about my mom a lot and what she went through to raise her kids and if I can contribute to make her happy—but she's happy regardless."

There are many important people who have helped Quigley throughout his 30-year career. "One of the best days of my life was when John Boynton said he would represent me. He's instrumental to everything

I do," Quigley explains of his business manager. Boynton, co-founder of Russian search engine Yandex, is also an avid collector of Quigley's work. He's purchased portraits of Abraham Lincoln, Jackie Robinson, Ted Williams and Muhammad Ali among others. Quigley was also introduced to another art collector, Alexander Zweig, through TV producer Brian Sullivan. "Alex has really been a great supporter of my work. He purchased eight paintings off the internet without ever seeing them in person," Quigley adds.

### NOT QUITE THERE

Despite his proclivity toward capturing famous subjects, Quigley has managed to stay out of the spotlight. However, that may change with his latest groundbreaking project, entitled "Not Quite There." VICE director Dominic Musacchio is shooting the new documentary film and reality TV show, which chronicles the life and times of Quigley and his zany adventures.

At one time, the outgoing Quigley battled with his desire to become an actor and considered giving up painting entirely. "The biggest fear is that this [show] kind of becomes something else and you can't go outside and walk down the street anonymously. Even though, sometimes you walk down the street and think 'why doesn't anybody know my work?' When you are more well known as an artist, it's how you sell paintings," he explains.

### GIVING BACK

Honored as VH1's Visual Artist of the Year in 2007 for his charitable contributions, Quigley continues to make philanthropy an important part of his life. He's turned his own paintings into a fashion apparel line called "Skrapper" with the goal of raising money to help younger artists. Quigley also lends support to many children's charities and the Wounded Warrior Project. For the past four years, he and Long Island multimedia artist Ben Moon have held a benefit art show in East Hampton dubbed "The Pleasurists" to raise funds for various charitable causes.

### NEVER FORGET

After talking all things art, Quigley disappears into the back of the studio and returns with an oil on canvas portrait of former President George W. Bush. In 2000, Quigley was commissioned by George H. W. Bush to paint a portrait of his son. Fast forward less than one fateful year later to Sept. 11, 2001. Quigley was



**Clockwise from above:** William Quigley's painting table at his East Hampton studio. Daniel Meeks (left) and William Quigley (right) stand beside Quigley's portrait of President George W. Bush painted on 9/11/2001. William Quigley, "That actor who played John Adams. He didn't like to be vice president," 2016, oil, acrylic, collage on canvas, 74 x 74". Photo credit: Eileen Kotak.

living in Lower Manhattan, just a few blocks away from where the Twin Towers fell. As he watched the horror unfold on TV, he began painting a second piece of then-President Bush. "Your stomach is in your throat and I could hear people screaming," he explains. "I started this and never touched it. I never had a chance to show George [W. Bush]."

As he examines the painting again, Daniel Meeks stops by the studio. Meeks custom frames all of Quigley's paintings in his East Hampton workshop. "I love this piece," he says of the 9/11 portrait. "It was stashed for almost 15 years and I saw it for the first time in 2013. It's just such a well done portrait and...so much love and work went into it."

Quigley agrees that the presidential portrait is probably one of the most valuable, historic and personal paintings he's ever done.



Would he ever consider parting with it? "I would sell it to George [W. Bush] if I ever have the opportunity to talk to him again, or if it can help some family or organization," he says.

### LIFE IMITATING ART

"Life imitates art far more than art imitates life," Oscar Wilde once wrote. Whether it's on a canvas, T-shirt or TV, William Quigley's life and art appear to be one and the same—and filled with limitless potential. So what's his secret to never giving up along the way? "I think I'm very lucky...I never feel special about it. I just feel I have been fortunate. If I am in trouble financially, someone always comes through. Because of that, it's given me this confidence that what I am doing is interesting to people." **LL**

Melissa Argueta is a writer who lives in Huntington. She has a penchant for pop culture, fine art and epicurean adventures.