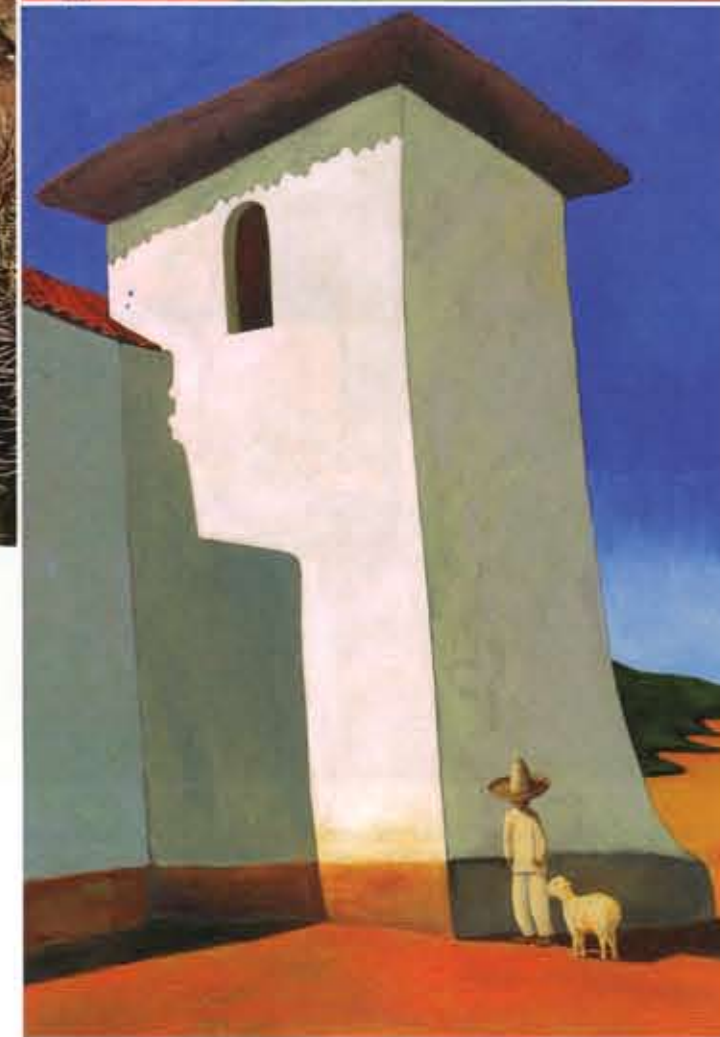
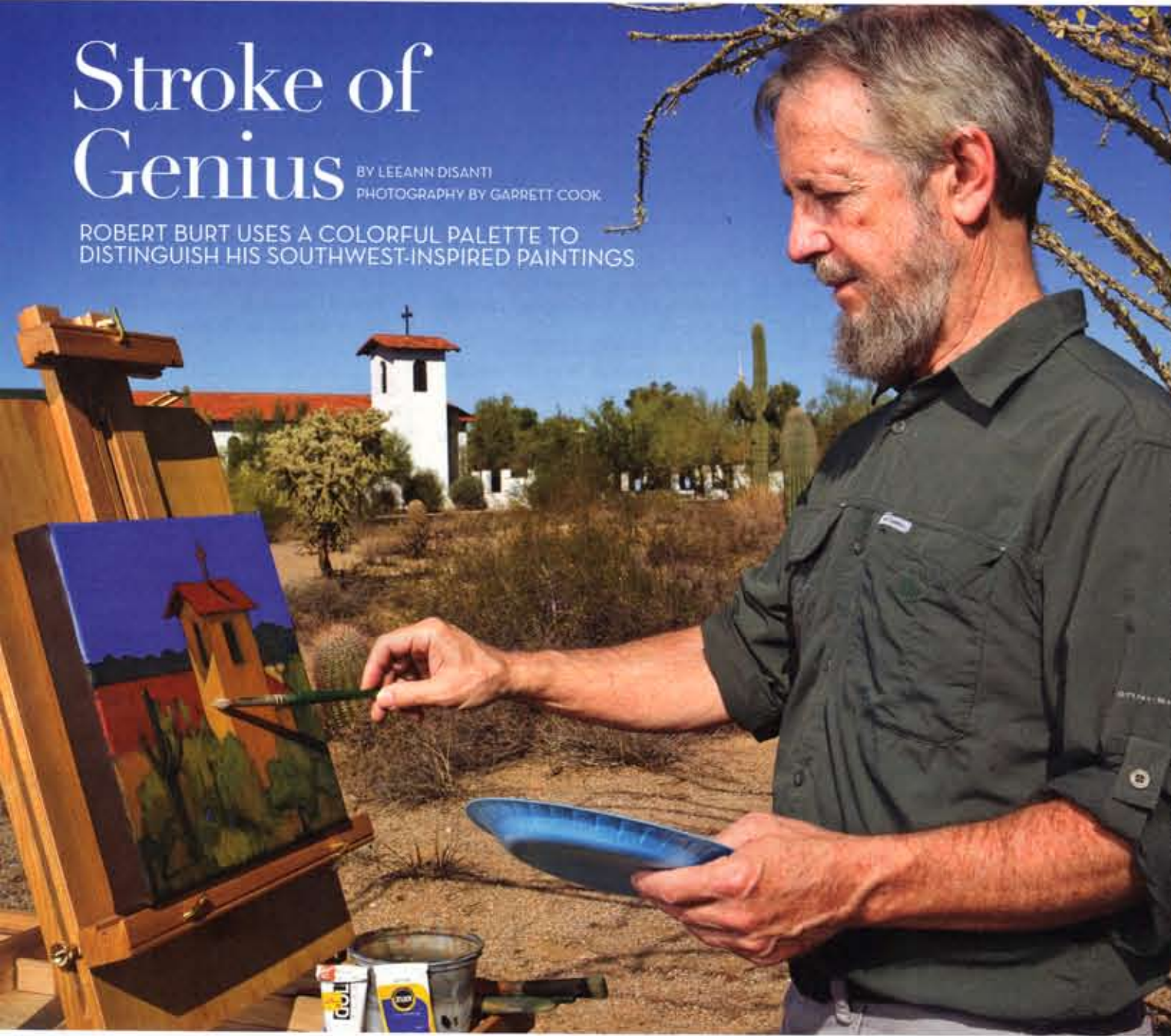


Stroke of Genius

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ROBERT BURT USES A COLORFUL PALETTE TO DISTINGUISH HIS SOUTHWEST-INSPIRED PAINTINGS.



Opposite: Robert Burt works on an acrylic painting of a Catholic school in Mesa, Arizona. He likes using thick-edged gallery wrap canvases, so that frames are unnecessary. The artist believes frames detract from the paintings themselves.

Top: *Passing Red Adobe* is a 30"H x 30"W acrylic painting.

Left: This 60"H x 40"W acrylic piece titled *Shepherd* depicts a sombrero-clad man with a sheep standing near a Mexican adobe church.

For Southwest painter Robert Burt, subject matter does not come from books or travelogues. When in need of inspiration, he packs up his van and travels throughout Mexico and the American Southwest in search of secluded landscapes.

This lifestyle is a far cry from the artist's East Coast roots. Growing up in a small town near the Catskill Mountains in New York helped foster his

appreciation for diverse environments, as he often had the opportunity to experience the cultural differences of New York City. In addition, an uncle who worked as an artist piqued Burt's interest in art as a young boy; the man would give him chess lessons, while simultaneously educating him on a work of art that hung in Burt's home.

In college, Burt's creativity flourished. "You're surrounded by art and you are able to learn from

other artists as well as yourself," he says. Although he took a variety of courses in charcoal drawing, design and art history, Burt's affinity for color led him to batik, an ancient fabric-dyeing technique that uses wax to keep color from penetrating desired areas of cloth.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Burt opened several galleries on the East Coast that showcased his batik creations. The success of his galleries had an adverse effect on his artwork, however. "I became more of a businessman than an artist," he recalls.

Making a drastic lifestyle change in the mid-1990s, he sold his galleries and moved to the New Mexico high desert, where he concentrated his efforts on painting. "The East has a thousand shades of green," he observes. "The Southwest is drier, the col-



Top: *Summer's Shadows*, a 24"H x 30"W acrylic work, illustrates how long shadows inspire Burt's Contemporary Minimalist paintings. **Above:** This 36"H x 48"W acrylic painting is titled *Southwest Pueblo Life*.

ors are different, and everything is made of adobe." In fact, he is fascinated by adobe. Historic adobe buildings are common subject matter, and he has devoted much of his time to developing his portrayal of the material. "Adobe is like pottery," he comments. "It is smooth, but still has ripples and allows light to reflect off it."

He enjoys working with acrylics and pastels—mediums that he says do not force him to sacrifice the rich yellows and oranges that reflect the desert. For example, "with pastel, the paper grabs the color so you can add layer after layer," he notes.

Burt uses the Southwest environment as a muse for his art. He travels throughout New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico in search of "funky" elements that catch his eye. "I will take the most important things in a scene and leave the rest out," he explains. Most people take a landscape at face value. But Burt's mind goes to work, mentally removing clouds, repairing ramshackle buildings and brightening warm desert tones to convey a sense of tranquility. It is this edited version of reality that the artist depicts.

"There is something magical about his artwork," says Elaine Horejs, director of Scottsdale's Xanadu Gallery—one of the galleries that features Burt's paintings. "He has a richness in his colors and shapes that clients just love." Curves such as those found in a sombrero, window or even a shadow are characteristic of the artist's technique. Roads are another common feature; he uses them to "bring people into a painting."

Also reflected in Burt's art is his passion for other cultures. "The West has this cultural mix of Hispanics, American Indians and gringos," he says. Characters in his paintings are people he has encountered in his travels. In one work, titled *Dos Sombreros*, two boys are dressed in traditional mariachi outfits—a "snapshot" from a trip to Mexico. Another painting shows Peruvian girls wearing *monteras*, traditional hats or head cloths worn by women in the Andes Mountains. When not traveling, he splits his time between a home in Arizona and a residence in a rural, mountainous area of Mexico.

The artist lives by a "less is more" motto, saying, "I don't like things that are too stressful." This is reflected in his paintings. "I want to start telling a story and let the viewer finish it," he remarks.

See Sources.