

# Art That Transcends Time

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## *Building on the past to embrace the future*

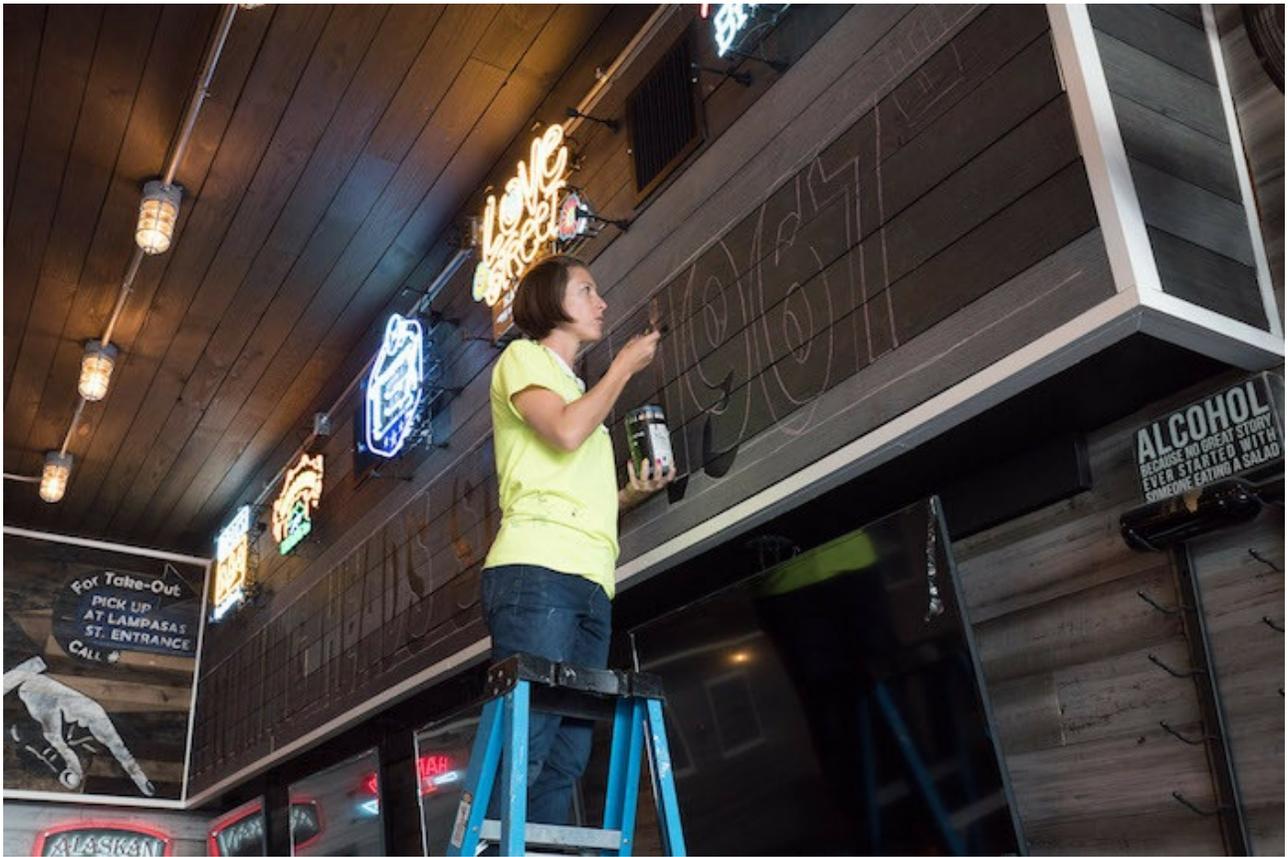
Communication is integral to daily life. Whether we speak with another person, interface with a machine, or read a document, it's vital that we each find ways to successfully convey intended meaning, thoughts, and feelings to others. Some do this best through the written word, others are natural orators, and still others prefer to draw or paint.

Longtime Georgetown resident and artist Sarah Blankenship identifies with the third category and has since she was a child. “I’ve always loved to draw and paint,” Sarah recalls. “I took classes with my mom, and in school it was my favorite class.”



Given her a lifelong love of art, it was only natural that Sarah would want art to be her profession, too. Initially, she planned to work in computer animation and began studying at the Savannah College of Art and Design. But she quickly discovered animation wasn't for her. Instead, she found a new calling, thanks to Savannah's historic buildings. “Between the craftsmanship and how beautiful they were, the buildings were truly a work of art,” she says. She wound up majoring in historic preservation with a minor in computer art before becoming a project design assistant with the Texas Historical Commission's Main Street Program.

Sarah's work required her to create computer renderings of potential renovations to historical buildings. These renderings helped building and business owners visualize renovations to their buildings while preserving and respecting the structures' historical integrity. Though it was an artistic job that combined both aspects of her education, Sarah yearned for more. “I sat behind a computer every day making reports and renderings. I wanted to do more hands-on painting,” she says. “That has always been my passion.”



To satisfy her yearning for hands-on work, Sarah volunteered her talent to the city, designing and helping to paint the mural in downtown Georgetown facing Main Street. Many large canvas paintings in the Williamson County Museum took form thanks to her help as well. These were ideal projects for Sarah because she loves art in public places. She believes public art helps create the atmosphere of a space, an aspect she enjoys in her work. "I love getting to hear the client's vision of what they want the atmosphere to be," she says. "Whether that's commercial or residential, it's exciting to me to bring out somebody's vision for their space."



Her skills were put to the test when the 600 Degrees Pizzeria and Drafthouse wanted to restore the faded mural on the side of its building to its former glory. The mural is a hand-painted advertisement from 1922, when the building was home to the Sanitary Bakery. Sarah found the project to be the perfect combination of historic preservation and art. "It was so faded," she recalls of the mural. "To discover what it looked like earlier, I researched, called the newspaper to ask for more information, and asked people in the community if they had any information." Sarah pored over old photographs, looking for glimpses of the mural in its heyday.

Ultimately, it was Georgetown Public Library Reference Librarian Suzette Davidson who uncovered the mural's missing words, in an advertisement in a 1922 Southwestern University yearbook. "It's interesting how often my background helps with my painting projects," Sarah says. "There was a surprising connection to history with that one."



Sarah's experience hasn't been limited to exterior city spaces. She's tackled commercial and residential projects, too, and discovered that each comes with its own challenges. To cover a bakery interior with geometric shapes and lines, she brushed up on her math, wanting every angle and circle to be perfect. To give a residential bathroom an old-world look, she turned to photographs from her European travels, merging images from multiple locations into a new image and using it to paint a *trompe l'oeil* landscape. "I'm proud of how it turned out because it wasn't just letters, colors, or shapes. It was also subject matter, historic elements, and faux finishing. It was a fun combination," she explains. "Getting to share my travels while creating something new that gives the right feel is an outlet I didn't realize I would get."



When Sarah is asked to do something she hasn't done before, she steps up to the plate. She taught herself how to do gold-leaf lettering when a project called for it, and when she couldn't sketch a mural from a projected image, she switched to a grid system. For Sarah, the process is about being open to learning and improvising. "Improvise is one of my favorite words," she says. "It's what I say to my kids all the time. Every project is different and has new obstacles to overcome and things to figure out."

At this point in her career, Sarah has created art to grace many surfaces, including drywall, brick, stucco, wood—even cars. And that's exactly how she likes it. "I like that my art isn't one specific topic or only one medium," she says. "I would struggle continually doing canvas paintings where the art has a similar appearance. I like that I get to work on different surfaces, paint different styles, and work with different people."



In addition to being flexible in design, methodology, and the scheduling that is inherent to her painting profession, Sarah is learning to juggle the needs of her part-time job as the Arts and Culture Coordinator for the city. It's a new position she began in March that gives her the opportunity to help the city and the arts community on a broad scale. Among her many responsibilities, Sarah assists with arts and culture programming for the city, champions and promotes the work of local artists and creative organizations, and oversees public art installation projects. It's just another way Sarah ensures art is accessible to everyone.



With every rendering and brush stroke, Sarah helps communicate her ideas. It's no wonder she finds it rewarding to see clients' faces light up when they realize Sarah has successfully brought their vision to life. For Sarah, an artist isn't just something she wants to be—it's something she needs to be. So as long as there's a surface needing an artist's touch, Sarah is up to the challenge and will be for years to come.

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For more information about Sarah and her work, visit [sarahjblankenship.com](http://sarahjblankenship.com), [facebook.com/sarahjblankenshipart](https://facebook.com/sarahjblankenshipart), or [instagram.com/sarahjblankenship\\_art](https://instagram.com/sarahjblankenship_art).