



Eileen Borgeson (right), owner of Medici Arts, Inc. in northern California, worked with Erte (left), considered by many to be the father of art deco.

# a *Muse* Inspired Artist

By Kris Wieber

**E**ileen Borgeson represents a unique niche in the awards and engraving market. Between awards and gifts for anniversaries, birthdays and great achievements, she creates a one-of-a-kind link with fine art. Her awards and presentation pieces are all works of art and have been responsible for tears of joy and ear-to-ear grins on giant celebrities and giants of the media industry alike.

## ARTISTIC AND BUSINESS BEGINNINGS

Medici Arts is Eileen Borgeson's company, appropriately named after the great Italian patrons of the arts. It is also the company responsible for the Muse, an award created for and given away by Promax. R.S. Owens, who also produces various other awards you may be familiar with, such as the Oscar and the Emmy, produced the Muse. Promax is a worldwide organization that awards media professionals responsible, in part, for such shows as *Seinfeld*, *Oprah*, and many others.

Borgeson has been doing awards of some sort for over twenty years, but her interest in art goes back far beyond that.

"I was young, grammar school age," says the artist of her beginnings.

Although neither of her parents are artists, they were always very supportive of her. Eileen states that, "My Mom would learn things, and then she would show me, and I would take over. I was always doing something, from the time I was very small."

And it has been something that she has done all her life—and done very well. In her twenty-plus years in the business, Borgeson has co-owned and operated a few different companies: Crystal Haze Designs, and Diamond Arts and Medici Arts, her own current project.

And it is with this company, with approximately 2,500 sq. feet on the Mendocino Coast in northern California, that Borgeson plans to make a big impact on the awards industry. She is currently working out a plan to distribute a variation of the Muse (there are currently five in the series) to retail award shops.

## COMMISSIONED CREATIONS

Borgeson has been commissioned to do awards and presentation pieces for a wide array of prominent people and organizations: B.B. King, Elton John, Aerosmith, Ronald Reagan, Friz Freleng, Chuck Jones, Erte, the Dalai Lama, Warner Bros., MCA, Universal, United Way, Fox, World Film Institute, Toyota, the Jimi Hendrix Estate, the John Lennon Estate and the San Francisco Giants. According to the report to Borgeson, when B.B. King received his award, "tears came to his eyes."

The guitar award commissioned by Vartan of MCA Records and given to B.B. King is

also one of the more memorable projects Eileen has been commissioned to do.

"That was a real creative challenge with the concept, coming up with his guitar, Lucille. It was great to be commissioned by MCA and Universal and really given carte blanche by them to create something that would be really rich and dynamic for him."

Eileen also lists the Dalai Lama piece and the Jimi Hendrix piece as memorable projects. She says the Hugh Hefner 'Luminaire' was also amusing.

"It was actually commissioned by several of his closest associates, who were all part of the Playboy mansion. It was one of his girlfriends, at that particular time, and I was able to direct one of the photographers. I had a wide array of visuals to work from in putting her into a glass, carving her voluptuous image. That was fun and interesting, and I got invited for dinner and a movie at the Playboy Mansion."

Another comical commission Borgeson did was for former President Ronald Reagan. "The Ronald Reagan glass jellybean jars was a funny one. They were etched jellybean jars that were given to all the visiting dignitaries; he loved jellybeans, Jelly Bellies. He was the jellybean President."

During his term, President Reagan gave presentation pieces of jellybeans in jars, and Eileen's company etched them. She had an incredibly detailed version of the seal of the President of the United States of America, created before the adhesive-back stencils that everybody uses in the industry today. Borgeson used a very thin metal stencil that she etched with photo-acid. The seal of the President of the United States of America is about an inch and a half in diameter, and Borgeson included every bit of detail—the E-Pluribus Unum, the eight stars, and the wings of the eagle holding the arrows—all of it.

Remarkably, considering all of the commissions she has had, Eileen has never done much advertising. Her artwork seems to have done its own advertising.

"We would have stories that would be written about us, and word just seemed to spread. I've done so little serious advertising. I can remember making presentations, but it was mostly upon request, you know, 'We want something, what can you do for us?'"

One project was a very special gift to



A front and back shot of the Muse of Inspiration.



A picture of the Muse, presented by Promax.



The Muse of Excellence, an evolution of the Muse.



The Muse was such a striking piece, one year R.S. Owens used it on the cover of their catalog in place of the Oscar.



An extraordinary gift to the patriarch of a large family, Eileen carved an image of the man and his wife during the prime of their lives in glass.

the elder of a very large family. It was a gift for an 83-year-old man's birthday.

To create the piece, Eileen looked at some pictures of him and his wife, who had passed away seven years earlier.

"I did a composite drawing of them at the prime of their lives and created a present from the whole family. This guy had 52 children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Every signature of every member of that family was carved in glass."

Eileen did a line drawing of them and had it translated so it was in raised black glass. "I included all of the handprints of the babies, and carved them into the glass. You can imagine him getting this. This is everybody descended from him and who they're married to. Every signature was personalized in glass, which means it will last for a thousand years at least, unless somebody breaks it. It will be part of that family from now on."

## ERTE

A great influence on Eileen, and a great artist himself, was the late Erte. Borgeson worked with Erte the last seven years of his life. He lived to be 97.

According to Borgeson, Erte, who is considered to be the father of modern art deco, was very famous for his fashion designs.

"He did these beautiful, whimsical, exotic females. I worked with him interpreting them into illuminated, carved, optical crystal," says Borgeson, speaking of her collaboration with the famous artist.

According to Borgeson, Erte, "Always felt that I idealized his work. He loved the way the images floated on glass. He loved new mediums and was always receptive to something new. He was quite a character."

In speaking about the influence of Erte, Borgeson said that his influence definitely came through in her own designs. Although, she admits, her work before Erte had a kind of sleek deco feeling.

"I love that era of artistic history," says Borgeson.

## THE MUSE

The Muse is an award given by Promax, a non-profit organization whose members recognize the best in the electronic media. For instance, they give out awards to whoever does the best advertising for ER, Fraser or Oprah for the best TV programs. Whether it's a TV spot or a billboard or a media package—there are different categories—the best get a Muse.

Some of the companies that belong to Promax are CBS, NBC and Fox. Originally called BPME, the organization has grown from its small start to include sixty nations and holds several award shows worldwide.

However, Promax hasn't always given the Muse as their award. At one point they had a plastic award. Jeff Allen, a pioneer in the holography field, has worked with Eileen for years and says that, "I was working with them, talking about doing a whole holographic installation for one of their conferences, and Eileen was running around their office and saw their award and said, 'What are you doing giving this thing away? You guys need to upgrade your image.'"

Eileen continues the story, "It was this terrible, little rectangular piece of clear plastic with a little simulated, floating medallion in the middle, with a black plastic base. I said, 'Come on, guys!'"

At that point, Eileen was doing a lot of carved glass awards and upgraded them into a cast glass carving of their medallion. That was



This replica of B.B. King's "Lucille" was done in German Optical Crystal and inlaid with gold.



The "People's Muse Award". It is this award Borgeson is considering offering to awards retailers to give to anyone responsible for outstanding accomplishments.

the first upgrade; then she went from lower-end bases to higher-grade marble bases. Next, Eileen got them into higher-grade materials, such as optical crystal. From there, Eileen jumped into the Muse sculptures.

"Once I finished the design on the sculpture, the president of Promax at the time, who is now president of the Emmys, looked at it, and half jokingly said, 'Well, this is either going to make or break Promax.'"

Since then Eileen has done a series of five different Muses. The Muse of Creativity and the Muse of Inspiration are a couple. The first two are now being distributed worldwide.

The Muse of Creativity is basically made the same way as the Oscars; made by R.S. Owens. The Promax award is cast in zinc and then plated with nickel. In an ongoing process, it's plated with copper, brass, silver, and then 24-carat gold. Each sculpture goes through a very detailed process that includes hot metal sculpting, casting, polishing and a very sophisticated mold. The Muse of Creativity is a twelve-part mold.

R.S. Owens thought it was so beautiful that one year they actually put it on the cover of their catalog instead of the Oscar.

#### HOLOGRAMS AND FUTURE AWARDS

As a creative and prolific artist, Eileen always has dozens of ideas for her work. Speaking of her ideas of what the future of



Incorporating holograms into fine art, here is a picture of Eileen's EarthRise.

awards will be, she said, "Some of the most important elements are going to be light, holography, kinetics, structural designs, new metals, and using multi-media. All of these things, I think, are going to be some of the important points that I

would like to see, and that I would like to incorporate."

Through her long-time working relationship with Jeff Allen, Eileen knows the world community of holographers. She says that you've probably already seen some awards where they use diffraction grading to enhance awards—those rainbow sparkles that you see on a lot of trophies—that's holographic material. Borgeson says that since she has become much more knowledgeable about the whole holographic industry, she has created a few awards that incorporate 3-D holograms.

One sculpture Eileen has created is called EarthRise, and it's a futuristic city, up in space.

You see a holographic earth rising up, and the earth itself is full of color. It's actually a 3D hologram encased in glass. Eventually, says Borgeson, we'll be able to put holographic portraits of the people who are winning the awards into the awards. "It can be done now, it's just not being offered and we haven't set it up."

"Now that we're into the future, the twenty first century," says Borgeson, "one of my main focuses is going to be creating awards with futuristic designs and with futuristic materials in mind. That's something I don't see in the awards. I see a lot of traditional things. I want to break beyond that barrier and get into some of the newer materials, especially holography and cast glass, crystal and metals."

Borgeson says that holography is one of the most futuristic advances in technology that exists in our society.

She says, "It's magic, it creates rainbows and diffraction of light. It's a medium that excites people, from tiny little kids to the elderly, because it's so unique and different."

#### ARTISTIC PSYCHOLOGIST

Have you ever had a client that wanted something, they just didn't know what? Figuring out what someone wants can be a challenge, and it is the first step for Eileen's creative process.

Borgeson states, "Sometimes, you get somebody who has a whole concept and a vision in mind. The most fun is to take somebody's vision and make it become a tangible reality. Other times, I'll go in and have my bag of tricks with 12 different mediums and materials, and just mix and match to show them something. I'll do sketches or put metal, marble and glass together to show how these materials can work together. I'll show them different types of illumination—neon to fiber optics to regular light. I'll go as far as it takes to get from them what they have in their mind, and create something unique. The more I can pull out of a client, the better. I'm almost like an artistic psychologist."

Borgeson states that she has to ask people several questions to figure out exactly what it is they want. She states that it's hard for

a lot of people to verbalize what they want, and oftentimes they don't know until they see something. Obviously, visuals are important, as is being able to direct them a little bit. She says she tries to get as much information about the person receiving the award as possible.

Eileen says she also likes to give clients options of what she can do for them, because she understands that everyone has a budget. She offers them an elaborate piece and a simpler piece.

"Usually we end up somewhere in between," says Borgeson.

Borgeson credits her ability to offer a range of price points to her "bag of tricks."

"I have so many tricks," says the artist. "People call me a MacGyver, I have always got a way to make it work, when we have to."

#### CREATIVE PROCESS

For Eileen, the creative process is a long one, and an idea may journey through several different mediums and craftsmen before complying with the original picture in her head.

"A sketch is always a good beginning point," says Eileen. "I always will create drawings and sketches and then blow them up and shade them. A visual, you know the old adage, a picture is worth a thousand words, and even the quickest, roughest sketch gives somebody a concept."

From the drawing board to creation, Eileen says that she does most of her prototyping in-house, but only some of the production. Eileen explains that she has relationships with several talented people she's worked with over the years, and is a "master coordinator" of their special skills.

On certain projects Borgeson will have up to seven different people or companies working on a particular piece. For instance, on the B.B. King presentation piece, she had an acrylic company, a waterjet company, a computer person, and a stencil company. Other companies did the polishing and sandblasting. She gets gold from another company, and puts the gold work on with glue.

"I'm a glue master, a glue mistress," states Borgeson.

A lot of what makes it possible for Eileen to make her awards such high-quality pieces is her ability to work with

different people. Over the years, she has developed a tremendous resource base.

Eileen says she knows where she can get anything done, and never feels limited. That confidence comes from an abundance of knowledge about several materials to sculpt or cast in, and knowledge of many of the different types of glass and crystal available.

States Eileen, "Glass is one of the few things I have been able to keep consistent. I love glass, but I love it combined with something else."

#### MATERIAL VERSATILITY

When it comes to materials, it would be more time conservative to ask Borgeson what she hasn't worked with, rather than what materials she has. Eileen states that her customers may have an idea of what medium they want. However, whether they want their sculpture in glass, a combination of materials, a 3D image or a flat piece, it's no trouble for Eileen. She is an extremely versatile artist.

When asked what materials she has worked with, Borgeson paused, and then said, "I don't think there's a material that I haven't ... I haven't worked with titanium as much as I'd like to. But I have an understanding of it. I've designed for hot glass, blown glass, cast glass, haven't done too much with fused glass yet. I've worked in brass and copper, aluminum, stainless steel, and regular and mild steel, acrylics, plastics, quarry marble and granite, onyx, lots of different kinds of wood—there was one Disney award that had a huge amount of materials in it: aluminum, brass, black glass, crystal, metal, marble and walnut—and then lighting, let's see, from simple light strips, to fluorescents, to fiber optics. I have some really great resources for beautiful small fiber optics. Then there's cool neon that exists now, too."

As if she weren't diversified enough, Eileen actually looks for materials that are just being created to work into an artful sculpture. She has discovered that Lawrence Livermore Laboratories has created a material that is supposedly lighter than air.

Remarking on the material, Eileen says, "It's a hard one to conceptualize. We'll keep you updated with the evolution of that." 