

ON THE COVER

Boat by Niece Borges

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on July 13, 2022.

This month's cover image, *Boat*, was inspired by George Washington. More specifically, and accurately, by Emanuel Leutze's famous painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Most Americans know it. The first president is shown standing near the bow of a crowded boat, gaze fixed on the approaching shore and, perhaps, on the still uncertain fate of his new country. The crew are fending off chunks of ice that choke the river, trying to make headway in a difficult passage. Niece Borges likes to take motifs or images from American culture and history and create her own versions or reinterpretations. She says that what affected her about Leutze's painting was the idea of people united by a shared voyage and purpose struggling to move ahead. However, in *Boat*, instead of soldiers and patriots committed to a cause and a leader, there are many different kinds of people, with only the vessel and the journey bringing them together. According to Borges, they could be immigrants, several are women, people of color and queer, each with their own dreams and desires but going in the same direction, at least for now. There is no leader.

Although an image like *Boat* prompts associations to events in the world, Borges does not insist on particular meanings or on her personal perspective. Part of the fun in art-making, she maintains, is having people create their own understanding of an image however removed it might be from her own. And she also values the design of color and form in its own right, without any need for representational meaning. Consider, for example, *Boat's* carefully arranged composition. There is a central triangle, one of art history's oldest devices used to convey unity. But the mind also likes variety and visual counterpoint. Therefore, not all the figures are looking in the same direction. Borges has included one or two that seem to be staring out at us. And the man in shades has a white scarf that carries the viewer's eye back up to the right and away from the group, balancing any sense of movement to the left. In fact, balance is probably the key principle operating here. The cool blue figures are positioned to balance those in warm red, even as the hot pink sky meets a turquoise sea slashed strategically with white.

If *Boat* is "about" something, it is probably the experience of immigration, which is very familiar to Borges. She was born in the far south corner of Brazil and grew up near Porto Alegre, the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Drawing and painting were constant activities in childhood and encouraged by parents, with a father who attended drawing classes with his daughter and a mother who took her to museums. Nevertheless, it was felt that studies in graphic design and commercial art might be a more fruitful career path than the risky route of exhibiting and trying to sell paintings. It was not a great sacrifice because Borges had always enjoyed looking through fashion magazines and their advertisements and illustrations of women. Brazilian women, in particular, with their mix of native South American, European, and African ancestry, were always an inspiration. She enjoyed representing their everyday lives. She also liked experimenting with digital art and the possibilities offered by software applications to produce imaginative work quickly. Borges succeeded in her chosen career, becoming a freelance commercial illustrator with clients including Instagram, Adobe, Apple, IBM, Teen Vogue, and Twitter. She found herself traveling to the United States to work and staying for longer and longer periods before returning to Brazil. She finally relocated to this country in 2015.

Travel and movement are, therefore, also favorite themes in Borges's art, in part reflecting her own transition between two countries. Unlike the native-born who stay in place, immigrants lose their homes and previous lives in the process of finding new ones. But the first homeland persists in memory, springing to life through return visits, and the bonds of family and friends that pull immigrants back to their roots. Borges refers to it as an "in-between life," being at home now in Brooklyn but still tied to her origins in Brazil. Perhaps, it is this experience that makes her sensitive to the plight of many newcomers and the obstacles they face. We are fortunate at *American Psychologist* in benefitting from the talent, artistic vision and empathy she has brought to her new home.

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