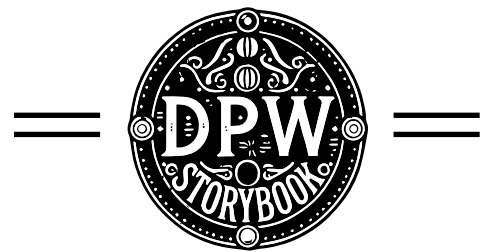


BOBTUSE

BobTuse, a veteran member of the DPW, joined in 2001, starting with the ‘Clean Up’ team, which later became Playa Restoration. Over time, he took on various roles, supporting the Transpo department and helping build The Man. Known for his skills in logistics and driving, BobTuse became proficient in hauling trailers and managing supply runs in Reno. He’s also an amazing artist, creating vibrant paintings that capture the essence of DPW life and its memorable moments, including epic scenes like the Golden Spike ceremony.

This interview was conducted by “Flo”, Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2018. Most of Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.



“Playa restoration was just called ‘clean up’ then.”

BOBTUSE In 2000, I joined up with Playa Restoration, which was just called “Clean Up” then. That year, we mostly stayed on the playa. There was a big dust storm, and I was in a Volkswagen van, and this huge dust storm lasted for days. When the dust cleared, I met these people who were camped near me. The guy’s name was Burning Dan, he was the Clean-up manager that year. We didn’t go to the ranch at night like everyone else;

instead we camped out at various hot springs. Our crew didn’t want to be on the ranch, because the ranch was kind of a nasty place, very dirty and dangerous.

Bubblegigue was on that crew. He’s the only person I can think of who is still around to remember that experience. Mainly, we cleaned up the Burn Platforms. Like, before there was heavy equipment, we used to make this corrugated metal platform that they put the Man on, and all of the big burns. They were just made of wood and corrugated metal. We would just pick them up by hand, 5 or 10 of us, hold our breath, and all the ash would just rain down on us. Then we’d clean up the mess with shovels.

But, 2001 was more like the real DPW experience, living on the Work Ranch. That was my most interesting year, I think, but ‘02 and ‘03 were similar. It was still very raw and crazy, maximum anarchy which became more civilized around 2004,

when we started living in town at the Trailer Park instead of on the Ranch. It was funny, but it was also quite dirty... and a lot of drinking. It was kind of like Lord of the Flies.

You ever read that? You know the book Lord of the Flies? It’s when these boys are all—they’re all boys—and they’re lost in the Jungle. They became tribal. So, it was kind of like that. We were in the wild, you know, and it was mostly men in the early days. Probably 70%, or more. That was also the year of 9/11. And it was kind of interesting to be on the ranch for that, because we were so far away from civilization. We were physically far away from civilization, and also psychologically far away.

I’ve been doing Playa Restoration all those years. So, this is my 19th year in playa restoration, and much of that has been dune-busting, up until the present day. In 2002 I got hired for Transpo, a full-season paying job. My main job was running things from the ranch, which we called the



Photo credit: Summer Burkes, 2015.



Bobtuse working on The Man. Photo credit: unknown. Year: 2008.

“Another job I had was pulling trailers... It was one big shit show on wheels.”

80 Acres back then. In 2003 I started doing Reno runs as well as regular Transpo. I brought back tools, lumber, supplies of every sort on a daily basis.

I was assigned this job because I was one of the only people on the scene who had a clean driving record: with no DUI’s. I got to drive a really cool rental truck, with AC and

everything... a rare luxury then. It has been my main job at least since 2004, in the regular season. Not as much fun as dune-busting perhaps. But, the pay is good and it keeps me out of the heat and dust, in the hottest time of the year.

I also worked on the ranch a lot in the off-season, and on the various properties in town. I did many truck runs, hauling away old art cars, various forms of junk and hazardous waste, scrap metal etc... Super Dave and then Quinn were my managers, during this period. I worked a bit with Man crew... not officially as Man crew, but I was there when they built the Man for at least 10 years in a row. and I actually worked on the Man for a few days in 2003, building the arms and legs of the Man with Doctor Glow-wire.

Another job I had was pulling trailers, to and from the Ranch, Playa, Trailer Park, and rental trailers from Reno. I’ve done hundreds of trailer runs,

probably most of them between 2004-2012. This was also an on-the-job skill I learned, not having done it before, and those early trailers were mostly junk, illegal and often dangerous with rotten tires, broken hitches, flapping doors and that sort of thing. It was one big shit-show on wheels... but fortunately, they didn’t have to go very far, just 15-25 miles.

FLO So, what about your paintings? I’ve noticed that you are a painter, and your paintings are a reflection of DPW life.

BOBTUSE The last few years I’ve been doing the Burning Man theme. I can show you some. His name is Bilbo Baghead. He’s like the Unknown Artist. I call him “the most volatile man in the world.” Because he’s got a fuse: he has a lit fuse sticking out of his bag-like head.

FLO Can you tell me the story of one or two of the paintings you really liked?

“We played this prank where we buried a guy up to his face. [...] His name was Blackbeard. We smoothed everything over and made it look like there was nothing there. Then we put a cone over his head, ”



Painting of the Golden Spike by BobTuse.



BobTuse at the Ranch. Photo credit: Quinn Yarbrough, 2007.

BOBTUSE Well, it's the Golden Spike. The theme was Radical Ritual So, it's an acrylic painting, and the theme last year was Radical Ritual. Yeah in particular, they mention that the Golden Spike was the... it was kind of an example of the radical ritual.

FLO What does the Golden Spike mean to you?

BOBTUSE Well, it's the beginning of everything. It's the point where the Man will be established, where the spike goes in. That's the center of the city. And... yeah. It's just the opening spark of everything. It used to be that everybody would say something when they went out. But, now there's just so many people that most will just go up by groups. Not that many people talk, or it will just go on and on and on.

I thought of one story which was pretty funny. It was Playa Restoration. It's late in the game. Tony was the site manager. You know DA's kind of in charge, but Tony was the overseer of it all. We did this prank where... we buried this guy up to his face so that his whole body was underground, but his face was looking up. His name was Blackbeard.

We smoothed everything over and made it look like there was nothing there. Then we put a cone over his head, over his face. DA called on the radio and said, "Tony, there's something over here. We got a hot spot here, and it looks really bad. You better come and look." He says, "well, what is it?" He's talking on the radio. And DA says, "this is pretty bad, Tony, I'd rather you come over

here and have a look for yourself."

So, Tony drives over and he's wondering what is going on. This is something so bad we didn't want to mention it over the radio. It looks like any other place, except there's a cone, and there's something under the cone. When they pull the cone away, there's Blackbeard's face in the ground, and he goes "BAAAAH!!!" And Tony screams and he jumps straight up in the air! He's just terrified! That was one of the funniest things I've ever seen. He's thinking it's something toxic or something, and he sees a live human face in the ground screaming at him!!