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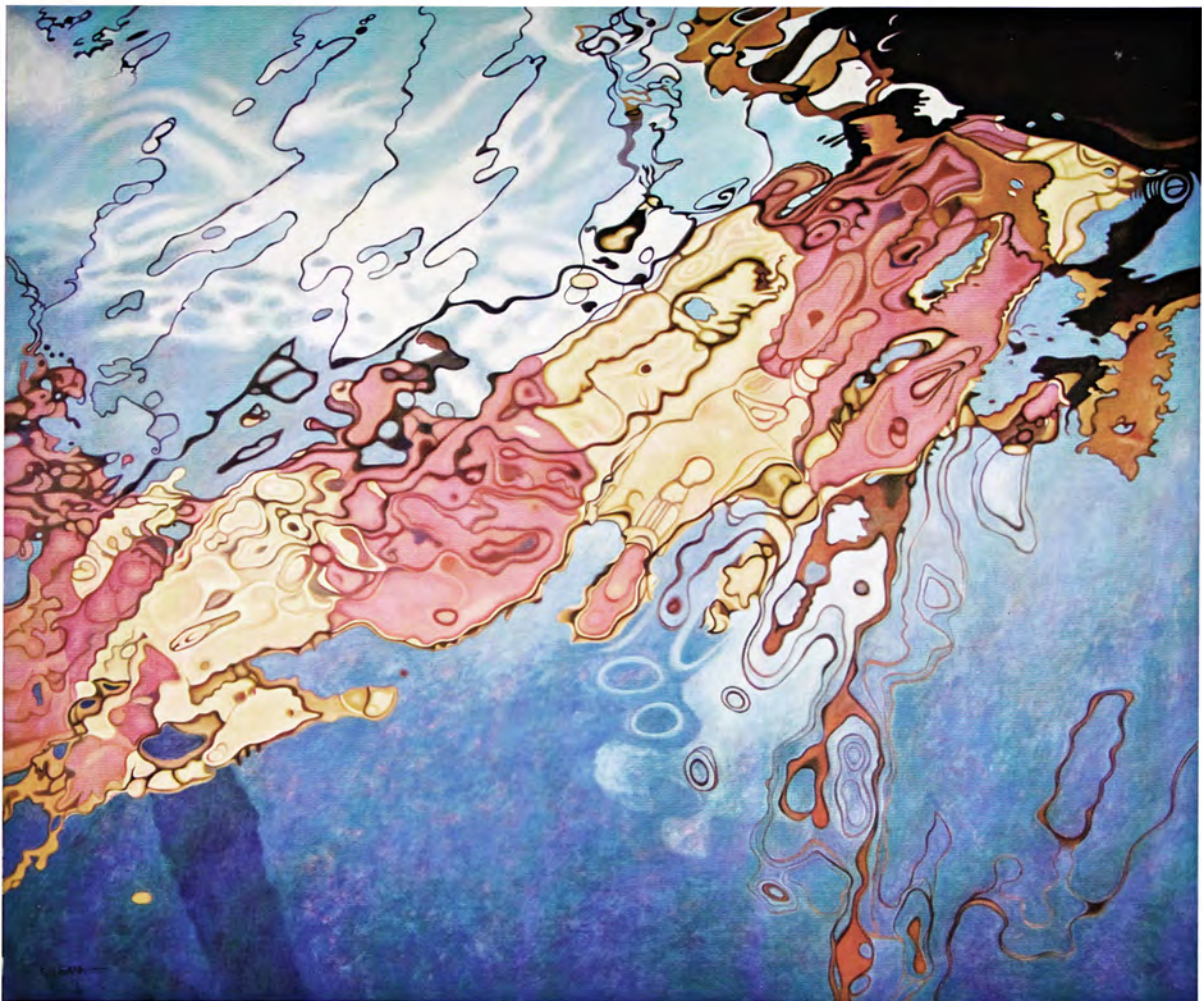
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ArtQuenchMagazine**

Abstraction

There is a line in art that no one sees yet everyone knows is there. It seems to me appropriate to share my thoughts about it, as an artist, for the premier edition of AQM.

The discourse of art encourages artists to designate themselves on either side of the line as either an abstract or a figurative artist. These are the labels that precede the name e.g. "figurative painter, Thomas Hart Benton" or "abstract expressionist, Lee Krasner." It's a kind of shorthand to understanding. Not being able to place an artist into a category can be uncomfortable. After all, it is often the first word used to describe an artist's work. So if there is no category, no "ism" they fit into, how does one talk about them and their work?

I disagree with this black or white approach. Instead, I imagine all art on a continuum with minimalist abstraction (International Klein Blue by Yves Klein) on one end and photorealism (Betty by Gerhard Richter) on the other. Sometimes within the oeuvre of a single artist there will be multiple examples from across the continuum. Occasionally, artworks may ride the line somewhere in the middle, as in Richard Diebenkorn's Ocean Park series. Is it figurative? Is it abstract? Who can tell. Perhaps the fact that it cannot be neatly boxed into one definition or the other makes it more interesting. Richard Diebenkorn said, "Abstract literally means to draw from or separate. In this sense every artist is abstract... a realistic or non-objective approach makes no difference. The result is what counts."¹



***Phoenicia Reflection Danielle Eubank
Oil on linen 60x72 inches***

I agree. All visual art, all representations, contain a certain amount of abstraction. What matters is making strong work that continues to engage the viewer or creator.

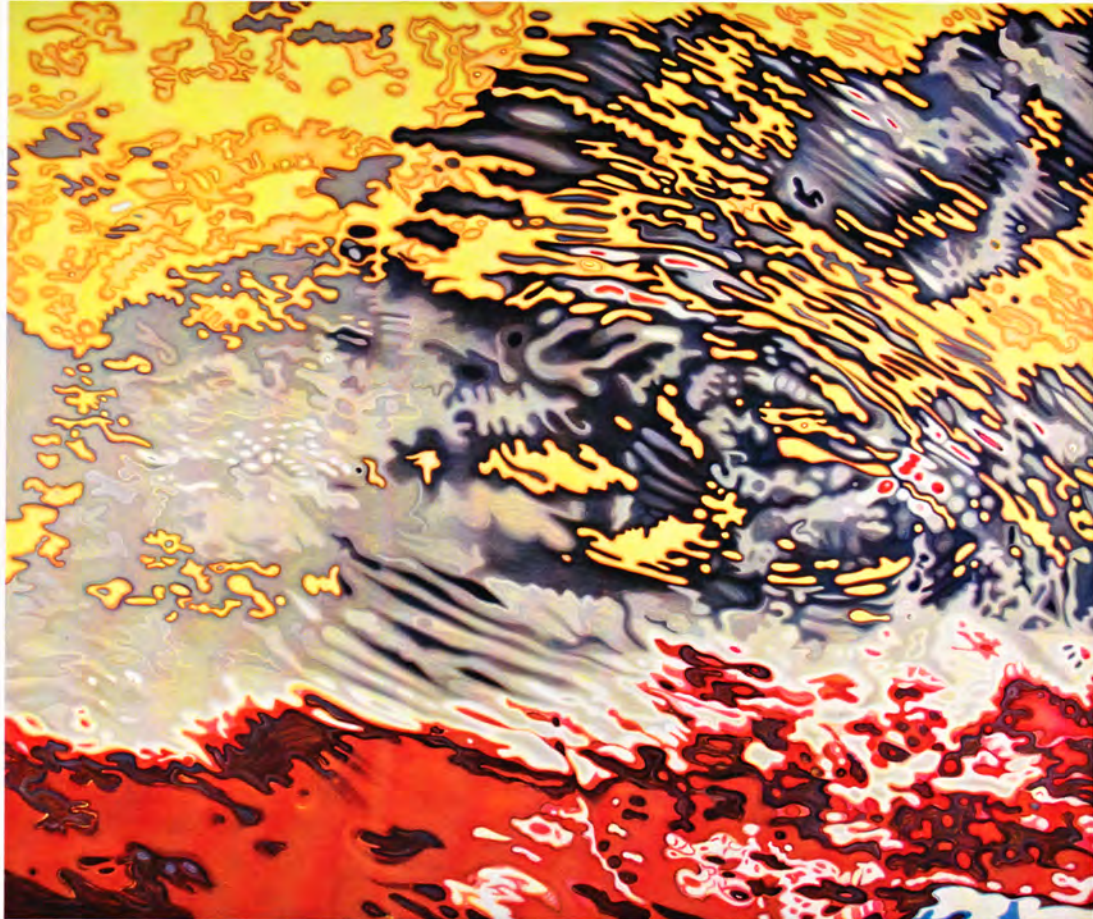
There is a snobbishness that favors the abstract or realistic approach depending on which camp one claims they are in. According to American poet Wallace Stevens, "Realism is a corruption of reality"² and "All good art is abstract"³ says American artist John Newman. The noted inventor of abstract art, Wassily Kandinsky said, "The more abstract is form, the more clear and direct its appeal."⁴

From the other camp, British sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein said, "To think of abstraction as an end in itself is undoubtedly letting oneself be led into a cul-de-sac and can only lead to exhaustion and impotence."⁵ While American painter Richard Schmid said, "I honestly believe students of painting in the next century will laugh at the abstract art movement. They will marvel at such a drawn-out regression in the plastic arts."⁶

Adopting elements of the other 'camp' is often seen as a compromise. Why a compromise? If lending abstraction to a figurative work makes it more interesting, or vice versa, then it's not a compromise, it's an asset.

In my own work I seek to explore where the line lays, and what results when abstraction and realism are combined. I paint all manner of subjects. In my work about water, I deconstruct the physics of ripples and waves in order to create patterns within patterns. I paint vertical stacks of rhythms, layers of abstracted shapes that allude to layers of physical matter. For me, the 'real world' is a launching point to create works that evoke emotive responses for which art is the singular best communication tool. In other words, art (music, dance, sculpture, visual art etc) communicates in ways that words cannot.

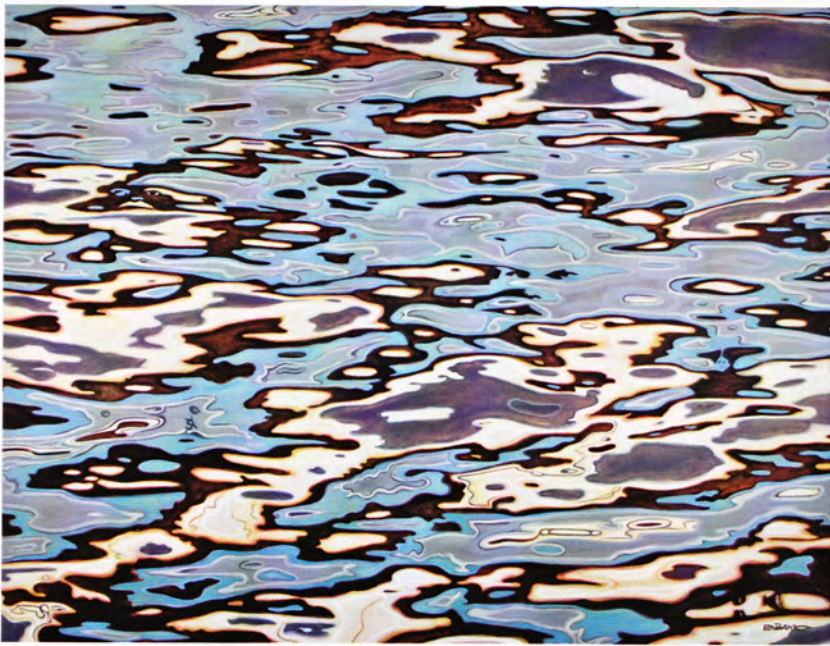
This is why I paint. I use the tools of abstraction (composition, color, line, form, texture) and the tools of figurative work (memory, symbolism, light) in combinations to evoke emotional responses.



Mozambique IX Danielle Eubank
Oil on linen 60x72 inches

In Mozambique IX I painted the shapes created by scum on water. While aboard Phoenicia, we spent a couple weeks in the small port in Beira, Mozambique. Metal fishing trawlers next to us were sandblasted all night long, releasing heavy particles into the air and on the water. The oily film, although presumably toxic, changed the surface tension of the water which inspired me. I created forms of ripples to create rhythms, and used colors and composition to describe the emotions I felt while there.

I sat on refuse while sketching for Phoenicia Reflection in Arwad, Syria. Children burned tires. Chickens poked in the mud for food. Below me, stuck in the muck of the boatyard waters, were baby strollers, plastic bottles, tires, food wrappers, and paint cans. Children were swimming. Although more representational than Mozambique IX, Phoenicia Reflection incorporates abstract formal elements to describe layers below, on, and above of the water. On the surface of the water, I painted a representational reflection of a sail of a replica 6th century BCE Phoenician boat to evoke the history of the area. Impressed by the layers of humanity that have lived in the spot where I sketched, I was compelled to paint how I felt about the continuum of civilization—not just the signs of recent generations (plastic, baby strollers), but also all our relatives from antiquity. I sat only a few feet away from a 2,500 year old Phoenician wall in the part of the world where agriculture was first developed in 9,000 BCE.



The Brooklyn Bridge II Danielle Eubank
Oil on linen 32x42 inches



South Africa Danielle Eubank
Oil on linen 48x42 inches

It seems to me that the definitions of abstraction and realism, like human civilization, are on a continuum. The line between figurative and abstract art is more like a spectrum and less like a divider. It is interesting to explore where the line lays, and what results when abstraction and realism are combined. They each contain valuable emotive tools. However, what really matters is the end result—art that makes the viewer feel and think.

Danielle Eubank
April 2014

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- 1Diebenkorn, Richard, *The Berkeley Years 1953-1966* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) p.36
 - 2Hollander, John, "To Reinvent Invention: John Hollander on Wallace Stevens," *American Poet*, 2000
 - 3"The Art of Rewiring a Brain" in *The Star*, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2011/09/27/the_art_of_rewiring_a_brain.html (27, September, 2011)
 - 4Kandinsky, Wassily, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover Publications; Revised edition, 1977) p.32
 - 5Epstein, Jacob Sir, *Let There Be Sculpture* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940) p.50
 - 6Schmid, Richard [personal confirmation Nov. 24 2013, quote Oct. 2013]