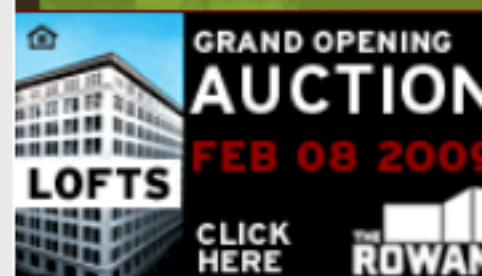


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Reflection from the Sea

Interview: Danielle Eubank

by A. Moret

California Native Danielle Eubank enters her garage-turned-studio wearing a distressed apron, flips on a portable heater placed next to her paint cart and begins to meticulously apply oil to a small area of large piece of linen that has been stretched over wood bracings. The linen is drenched in cool blues, purples, fiery reds and gray tones applied as if water were being traced beneath. Forms stare at me from her easel and are unyielding in their desire to reveal themselves. At first the shapes are nearly unrecognizable. Eubank's works do not implement a trompe l'oeil effect rather they demand that the eye remains patient. My gaze ignited the painting into a new wake of life, enlivening each bead of water to adopt its own strain of color. Eubank points to the painting and explains that it is the Phoenician vessel and the "sail is purple and white because the Phoenicians invented purple dye amongst many of other things." She puts her head down and once again the bristles scribble against the linen. "I consider all of my pictures to be Formalist," she added noticing that my head was now cocked to one side. "In other words they're not narratives, I'm not telling a story the body of the work probably tells, a story about the world and kind of where I've been." "Oil on Water" therefore is a show driven by memories of places past and the narrative that we beckon to hear waits patiently beneath reflections of destinations many of us have never seen.

The entire studio is lined with paintings, evidence of the many destinations Eubank has visited. Most are framed and tightly wound in plastic wrap. Each painting has a different name, alluding to the part of the world it was painted. The works from Bristol, England are bleak and gray indicative of the dreary British weather, while linens from Central Java and Bali are tropical and actually exude warmth. Taking baby steps around the perimeter of her studio I realize that each location has its own color palette. Eubank follows in the Impressionist oeuvre; to paint is to capture color and light.

Without even turning around she says, "While you set up, I'm going to finish this idea I was starting," she laughs. Her long dark hair entangles her face in a web of memory that she has grown intimately familiar. The fleeting vision of a body of water in a distant country becomes part of the present. The dry brush records color, movement, and the fleeting essence of water.

Her upcoming show "Oil on Water" at Found Gallery opens January 17 and features works from her travels to Indonesia, the Mediterranean, the North American West Coast, and Africa. Unlike many artists who take residency in other countries to set up studio spaces, Eubank is an expedition artist taking residency on board vessels that look more like pirate ships than cruise liners. Eubank's paintings therefore exhibit a rare combination of reportage and artistry. In preparation for the expeditions she packs linen and sketchbooks and a "little kit" she has made of primary warm and cool colors.

The show is a meditation of her voyage on an 8th Century AD Phoenician vessel called the Borobudur, a ship that traveled for 10 months and 10,000 miles from Jakarta, Indonesia, Seychelles to Madagascar, to Cape Town, South Africa, and to Ghana. She retrieves her sketchbooks and allows me to flip through the pages that still smell of oil paint. "It's my little brain" she says fondly and smiles, as I thumb through studies of water, people, animals, and even notes. "Oil on Water" is a play on syntax and imagery as it removes the canvas entirely and invites the application of oil on a natural element that is not surface, water.

Water became the dominant theme in her work in 2001 when traveling with a friend to Spain. Initially Eubank resisted painting water because "it's been done. I grew up quite close to the Pacific so there was a lot of art that was about that and it didn't appeal to me. It tended to be things like crashing waves or dolphins' bearing in mind this was the 70's right? Those sort of themes I couldn't relate to so that's why I never painted it." After growing tired of painting sand dunes Eubank finally turned around toward the water and spent the next several months in a small Spanish fishing village. Placing her paper on cardboard from a café she would "sit on the dock and look at the harbor." Her work eventually got closer and closer to the water and became more undulating. The undulation captured in her works reflects Eubank's sensitivity to the natural, fleeting and unpredictable quality of water.

Unlike many Impressionists who painted the same subjects at different times of the day to capture the change of light, Eubank follows in the en plein air practice with a few exceptions. "Oil on Water" required that she travel to the subject, paint outdoors, and much like the Impressionist that preceded her she studies the relationship between light and a particular geography.

Eubank is unsure about positioning herself in the Impressionist painting style, however she does recognize the Formalist elements of her work. Eubank asserts that "for me it's really about the shapes, the colors, and the lines- I'm not trying to break down the shapes, for me the game is to have it be about the shapes and the colors and the lines up close and then when you step back from it to kind of snap back into focus. And to have some kind of figurative element, so in other words I'm always paying homage to water." In order for the image to "snap" back into place Eubank captures the sense that her subject is fleeting and makes it tangible within the frame. Although the viewer may not be able to see it, the paint extends beyond the perimeter of the linen and spills on the sides of the composition. This is Eubank paying her homage to water and reminding us that we view water peripherally. The water is partly imagined as Eubank explains, "when do I get into into these shapes, I'm no longer looking at water but at the physics of water which are important to me and I have read a little bit about physics of things because that is a part of life and that's part of nature and that's part of who we are. And that's part of the game," she smiles.

The game however is one contingent upon memory. Are the representations of water in "Oil on Water" imagined or the artist's impression of them? We are familiar with Eubank's work even if we haven't traveled on an expedition around the world. Water is deeply a part of us and reflects who we are- fleeting, always changing depending on time, light, and place.

The opening reception will be held at the Found Gallery Saturday, January 17, 2009 from 6-9 pm

*"Oil on Water" will be featured at Found Gallery from January 17- February 22
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