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Danielle Eubank

Reflections through Formalism

Through the subject of water, Danielle Eubank shows how to paint a work that relies on form, pattern and color

My work explores the line between representation and abstraction, the tipping point between the visual and the conceptual. Because I'm primarily interested in lines, shapes, colors, textures and rhythms, I consider myself a formalist. Through the subject of water, I use the shapes caused by the interaction of natural forms and human influence as a foundation for deconstruction, breaking down those shapes into their constituent forms, patterns and colors. By focusing in close on the subject and layering the paint with broad brushstrokes, I invite the viewer to also come in close and experience the physical, painterly quality of the work.

When creating a painting, I first decide on the concept I want to explore and the formal elements that will allow me to do that. For my demonstration painting *Isle of Mull*, I wanted to see what would happen if I took pleasing colors and shapes and intersected them with harsh, jagged lines. In this painting, the complementary blue and orange play off each other in a balanced, joyful way and the oval shapes are rhythmic, sensuous and organic. In contrast, the jagged lines are violent interruptions that make me feel on edge. All of my decisions going forward are grounded in this exploration so that I constantly reevaluate my choices as the painting evolves.

As I contemplated *Isle of Mull*, I was thinking about my painting *Cape Town Waterfront III*, with its shapes and intersecting lines, in particular its areas of blended color that create forms within forms. In the new painting, I wanted to achieve similar forms but with a new palette and the addition of the tangled lines. Searching through hundreds of my photos I found the color combination I wanted



PHOTO CREDIT: FLETCHER BEASLEY, TUUNGA, FEBRUARY 2014



Cape Town Waterfront III, oil on linen, 38 x 38" (97 x 97 cm)

(I had been struck by the blue of the water surrounding the Isle of Mull, Scotland, the previous summer), but without the types of shapes I wanted. So I sketched, creating my own shapes, exaggerating until I achieved forms that pleased me.

While sketching I think about the kind of impact I want the painting to have, both up close and far away. This drives my composition which in turn informs

decisions about size. I wanted *Isle of Mull* to have a relatively simple construction of shapes and lines, which meant it would work best as a medium-large painting (28 by 44 inches): big enough to take up the viewer's peripheral vision from a short distance, but not so large as to lose the intimacy of the simple shapes. (My larger paintings, 5 by 6 feet and larger, are often more detailed to maintain intimacy of scale.)

Having decided on size and basic composition, I tried a number of different shapes and ratios of blue to orange. Ultimately I was drawn to ideas that had the most ovals with a roughly 60/40 ratio of blue to orange. I then exaggerated the ovals further until faces with round eyes started to appear in my sketchbook. At that point I was pleased with the rough plan and was ready to move from sketchbook to working

on the canvas.

To begin, I always coat the canvas with a colored ground. This serves two purposes: it unifies the painting by permeating the whole work with one color; and it creates interesting edges where two colors abut and reveal some of the ground between them. While the color varies, I usually use a warm color for my water paintings. For *Isle of Mull* I used hot salmon to imbue the entire canvas with a saturated pink to make the blues and oranges pop in the finished painting.

Next I draw gridlines over the ground with vine charcoal and then, using my sketches as a model, I draw onto the canvas, adjusting my lines until I'm happy. (I use vine charcoal because it's loose, easy to work with, and erases nicely. I also like the muddiness it lends when I mix paint into it.) Finally, I erase the grid lines and blow off any excess charcoal.

Next I decide what the tonal highs and lows will be and paint them in. I almost never use colors straight from the tube. Instead, I mix from a palette of nine warm and cool hues with which I can achieve almost any color. I also never paint with the end result color. Instead, I paint colors next

to and on top of one another, revealing a bit of the colors underneath which creates depth. For *Isle of Mull* I used dark brown and titanium white for the tonal highs and lows. I next painted the first layer of blue and gray. Unusually, for this painting I then added cobalt blue to make the blues pop alongside the orange.

Once I've put down the base colors, I continue around the canvas adding color with large and small brushes (flat and round boar bristle), creating each final color as a composite of others until each area is composed of a deep texture of color. As I work I push the paint hard into the canvas. For *Isle of Mull* I added red, which was not part of my original concept, but which complements the violence of the



Mozambique III, oil on linen, 30 x 24" (76 x 61 cm)

lines. I also scumbled in more white and black lines. Then, inspired by the blended areas in *Cape Town Waterfront III*, I scrubbed in areas of blended color, including purple, all over the canvas. I also added back pink to ensure that the orange areas were an amalgam of yellow and pink. I deepened the whites, smoothed some of the lines with gray, and added more light blue. Finally, I lifted the highs and deepened the lows by adding dark blue, purple, yellow, and orange.


I know I'm finished with a painting when I can't think of anything more to do to improve it. It's important to me to leave areas loose because the free, unpredictable stroke or edge creates more visual interest. However, I'm always mindful that it's tempting to overwork a painting. To avoid this, I sit on a bench across the studio and look at the painting. I leave it there for days, sometimes gazing at it through a camera or binoculars in order to abstract it to see if any areas need work. If they don't, I sign it using a color from the same palette as the painting. 



PHOTO CREDIT: DOUG SMITH, SYRIA, JULY 2008

My Art in the Making Isle of Mull



STAGE 1 PREPARATIONS

I collected visual references, made sketches working out my shapes, composition and colors, decided the size of the canvas, cut it out, taped it to a board, and then coated it with a salmon colored ground.

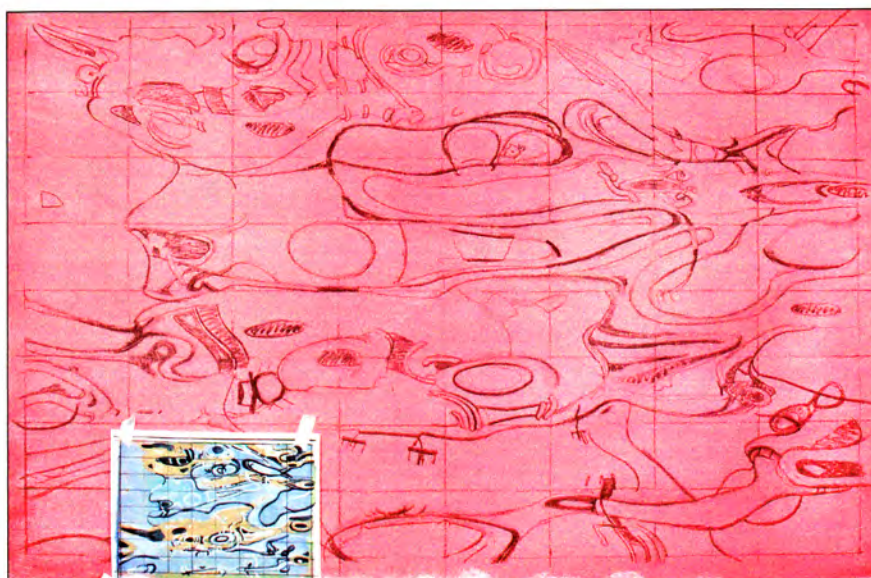
WHAT THE ARTIST USED

Colors

- » Burnt sienna
- » Burnt umber
- » Cerulean blue
- » Cobalt blue (not part of my standard palette)
- » French ultramarine blue
- » Indian yellow
- » Scheveningen lemon yellow
- » Scheveningen rose deep
- » Scarlet lake
- » Titanium white

Additional information on materials

I avoid lead products, clean my brushes with citrus oil cleaners, and use Gamsol instead of turpentine. I make every effort to create my artwork in an environmentally responsible manner. I use the highest quality materials. This includes low VOC or no VOC paints, thinners, and mediums, and FSC certified wood for stretchers. I recycle whenever possible.



STAGE 2 CREATE A GRID

I photocopied my sketch in order to remove it from my sketchbook, created a grid on the canvas using vine charcoal and transferred the sketch to the canvas refining shapes and lines in the process.

Continued ▶

STAGE 3
BLOCK
IN TONAL
VALUES

I blocked in where I wanted my highest and lowest tonal values to be, reexamining shapes and lines along the way.



STAGE 4 BLOCK IN ADDITIONAL COLORS

I blocked in where I wanted the blue, orange, gray, and brown shapes to be.



STAGE 5 PAINT OVER EDGES

I painted over the edges of the orange with red, and began adding color texture by painting in different kinds of orange, light and dark blue on top of what was there.

STAGE 6 MORE DEPTH COLOR

I painted yellow, dark brown, and gray over the white and black lines, added light blue, yellow, pink, and purple—all in the name of adding more color depth.





STAGE 1 FINAL HIGHS AND LOWS

Isle of Mull, oil on linen, 28 x 44" (71 x 112 cm) For the final stage I focused on smoothing some of the edges and adding my final high and low tones in the blue areas. I also added more purple to these and the black areas.



Mozambique IX, oil on linen, 60 x 72" (152 x 183 cm)



South Africa, oil on linen, 48 x 42" (122 x 107 cm)



Phoenicia Reflection, oil on linen, 60 x 72" (152 x 183 cm)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Danielle Eubank is a painter interested in the relationship between abstraction and realism. She is a recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant 2014-15.

In addition to her studio practice, Eubank is an expedition artist. She will be sailing aboard the barkentine tall ship, *The Antigua*, on an art and science expedition to the High Arctic in autumn 2014.

She was the expedition artist on the *Phoenicia*, a replica of a 600 B.C. Phoenician vessel. The ship sailed from the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal, around Africa and back into the Mediterranean, completing the circumnavigation in November 2010.

In 2003 to 2004 she set sail as an expedition artist on the *Borobudur Ship*, a replica of an 8th-century Indonesian wooden boat that sailed 10,000 miles around the African continent. She was also an artist-in-residence in Bali in 2005.

Eubank has worked as a commissioned artist, producing portraits for Standard Chartered Bank and for the Naval and Military Club in London as well as for many private individuals.

She has painted the Henley Royal Regatta since 2011. A short documentary film about her work, *Mozambique VI*, premiered at the Newport Beach Film Festival in 2012.



PHOTO CREDIT: YURI SAMUDA, PHOENICIA, SEPT. 2010

Eubank exhibits widely in the United States, the United Kingdom, as well as in Europe and Asia. She currently lives and works in Los Angeles, and maintains a studio in London.

Contact at
www.danielleeubankart.com