

What the Butler Saw

Attendant to Matters Esthetica that Abound in the House of Culture

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August 27, 2008

"Danielle Eubank"

Eubank's recent oils on linen propose that the world is not a stage, it's a marina.

Her work whets (wets) your visual appetite with the formal interplay of color and shape that abuts and ricochets on surfaces that whorl and roil, curlicue and crest.

The work is accessible (it's water) and profound (like an illustration to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*). It makes you think of Vija Celmins and J.M.W. Turner. No wonder Mark Twain spent hours gazing at the Mississippi River, a sentiment Paul Klee would understand the sentiment when he wrote "Peace on Earth is an accidental congestion of matter."

Her theme is water. She articulates its visuals (water that flows, that pools, and eddies) as well as its cyclical processes. She wants us to appreciate temporal effects (light that flickers, that reflects and refracts color) as well as to be aware of more permanent natural cycles (lunar tides, cycles of evaporation).

She paints the consequence of light on water (mass, volume, reflection, movement). The work abounds with nautical allusions (propellers, sails, anchors, buoys, oil spots, algae, rudders, fish, currents, tides). Her subject matter spans the globe (¾ of which is water): references to Indonesia (Jakarta, Semarang), England (London, Camden, Bristol, Brixham), South Africa (Haut Bay), France (Val d'Isere), and Italy (Venice).

The work is wondrous and vibrant, visually coherent and poetically sound. Fluid and elemental. Each piece appears gossamer-precious. The compositions are either complex (skeins of detail, like jellyfish tendrils or curlicues of spume) or simple (think buoys, archipelago's, hulls). The lines are lazy and languorous.

She isolates lapidary moments. The pictorial space is shallow, ambiguous, and multi-planar: sophisticated, the better to imbue and illuminate the restlessness of bodies of water. In pieces like *Cape Town Waterfront II* and *III*, the bottom half of each canvas seems to recede into the pictorial space, providing a view that a surfer would see as she looked down the face of a breaking wave parallel to the shoreline. The top half of the piece, however, looms over the viewer, as if it is about to break directly overhead and engulf the viewer.

Schisms and fissures of small wave crests punctuate the surface like the trails of water strider bugs. The surface breathes as with each tidal spasm. The work quivers, as if each piece is eager to move on, after it patiently holds its pose for her. The surfaces are taut like a sail but flow like a sail that billows. The texture is smooth and rippled. The colors are warm (reds) and cool (blue), like thermals, like whatever it reflects above or below its surface.

Eubank undergirds her work with a vigorous though barely apparent infrastructure. Compositional lines intersect on the diagonal or else on the rectilinear to lend balance and cohesion to the work that stabilizes these fleeting moments. In a piece from Cape Town, reflections on the water form loose horizontal lines that cross hatch wave crests. In another Cape Town piece currents criss-cross on the diagonal. In a piece from Camden, horizontal eddy swirls offset the vertical pull of gravity. Finally, in one of the Jakarta pieces, tiered splotches of sunlit reflections counter vertical aquatic squiggles.

Eubank's work reminds us that, though effects may vary from moment to moment, the process (lunar, cyclical...natural) remain the same. Her work makes us reflect on the underlying structure of life, on, as Aristotle would call it, the quiddities.

They present the variety of possible pictorial effects, gossamer and ephemeral, created with a minimum of means, structural and permanent. Visually they iterate the aquatic version of *E Pluribus Unum*, out of many come one.

Eubank is expedition artist for the 16,000 mile voyage of a replica-boat expedition circumnavigating Africa to reenact the 2,600 year old voyage of a Phoenician galley.



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