



A Conversation with Danielle Eubank, "Shape of Water," LAUNCH Gallery, by James Scarborough

Water keeps no shape of its own, so Danielle Eubank paints it in a material that keeps every shape it is given. That paradox sits at the center of "Shape of Water," opening August 8th at LAUNCH Gallery in Los Angeles, the latest measure of a two-decade dialogue with the ocean. The series continues her long relationship with the world's waterways, and here the Pacific serves as both subject and, in her own words, collaborator. "My work is about how water unifies us," she says, and her stated aim is not simply to depict the ocean but to renew people's attention to it, believing that closer observation breeds a wish to protect it.

The paintings build that attention from unglamorous material. Eubank draws her forms from ripples, oil slicks and refuse, working, as she puts it, at "the tipping point between the conceptual and visible." She assembles the results into patterns within patterns, vertical stacks of rhythm running through each canvas. Oil is opaque and slow to set, resistant to the fluidity it must conjure. That resistance becomes part of the method: texture built up rather than washed in, ocean and paint working together as co-authors of the surface. Eubank answered questions by email.

JS: You've described building texture in the paint to evoke wateriness. Does that

come through layering, impasto, palette-knife work, or some combination, and how has your handling of it changed since you started this series?

DE: Some texture is created by layering wet paint over dry. That is the way I painted water in the beginning. Since that time, I have started to add more techniques, like scratching in with a pencil, letting more charcoal show, drawing with oil sticks, layering wet brushstrokes on top of wet brush strokes and smoothing oil paint on the canvas with a pallet knife before I begin painting.

JS: Oil resists fluidity rather than mimicking it. What drew you to painting water in a material that pushes back against it?

DE: I see it a little differently. Oil paint is a liquid. For years I inhibited oil paint's true nature by painting wet over dry. Scumbling creates marvelous textures but doesn't communicate fluidity in the same way. Now I allow oil paint to reveal more of its character. Some of that comes from freeing my own mind, from painting "inside" the painting. In other words, I am not *depicting* water as much as attuning myself to its movement, its presence, its felt reality.

JS: Ripples, oil slicks and refuse: how does something as unglamorous as refuse find its way into a composition alongside something as fluid as a ripple?

DE: I am not a physicist, but as I observe water, there are times when the surface viscosity looks different, like in *Gowanus Canal VII*. There appears to be a layer of something floating on top of the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn and I have tried to communicate that through the forms I have painted as well as by drawing with oil sticks into the oil paint, leaving a burred surface. *Jakarta Dawn Miniature* is about the light caused by the sun's low angle, working its way through the polluted sky at dawn in the Bay of Jakarta.

JS: Patterns within patterns, vertical stacks of rhythm in each painting: does that structure start from observation, or does the rhythm emerge once you're already at the canvas?

DE: I am attracted to water that reflects the human footprint. *Moorea I* reflects a fence and bathers at the beach. In large part, I like this kind of water because surprising and indescribable patterns emerge. Once in the painting, I begin to feel the flow of water. As I drag the brush across the canvas I envision the flow of water and add my own shapes and contours. I break shapes down into smaller pieces. The great thing about visual art is that it has the ability to describe the world in ways that words cannot do alone. Who has names for all those shapes? I certainly do not. So with my brush I try to evoke the shape of water.

JS: You've talked about working at the tipping point between the conceptual and the visible. How do you know when a painting has found that point rather than settled on one side of it or the other?

DE: Ha! Great question, James. In my career, I have always been fascinated by the philosophy of the represented image. It is not real—a photo of a chair is not a chair. Nor is it abstract. A cubist painting of a chair is an abstracted chair. Is it an abstract painting? Many people would say yes. But it is a long way from pure abstract art, so many people would say no. At what point does realism meet abstraction? The two push and pull, sometimes one wins more ground than the other. Are organic ovoid glyphs in a ripple abstract or representational? I do not have an answer to this, but I love painting the interplay between the two.

JS: Twenty years sailing and painting every ocean on Earth, through One Artist Five Oceans. How does that history sit behind a series focused on a single ocean, the Pacific?

DE: Now that I have painted every ocean through One Artist Five Oceans, I increasingly am dissolving the distance between myself and the subject, allowing each painting to emerge from a deeper, more internal place rather than from an observational stance outside it. Having grown up on the Pacific Ocean, I feel as though it is my brother. So, while I evaporate the distance between it and myself, I remain vigilant against sentimentality, ensuring it doesn't creep into the artwork.

JS: You've said you want people to observe water closely enough to feel moved to protect it. What do you hope someone carries out of the gallery after standing in front of these paintings?

DE: Water is beautiful. Water evokes emotion and memory. We depend on water to survive. I think most of us are so busy that we don't spend time observing the world around us and appreciating it. The same goes for plants and animals and mountains and air and other people too.

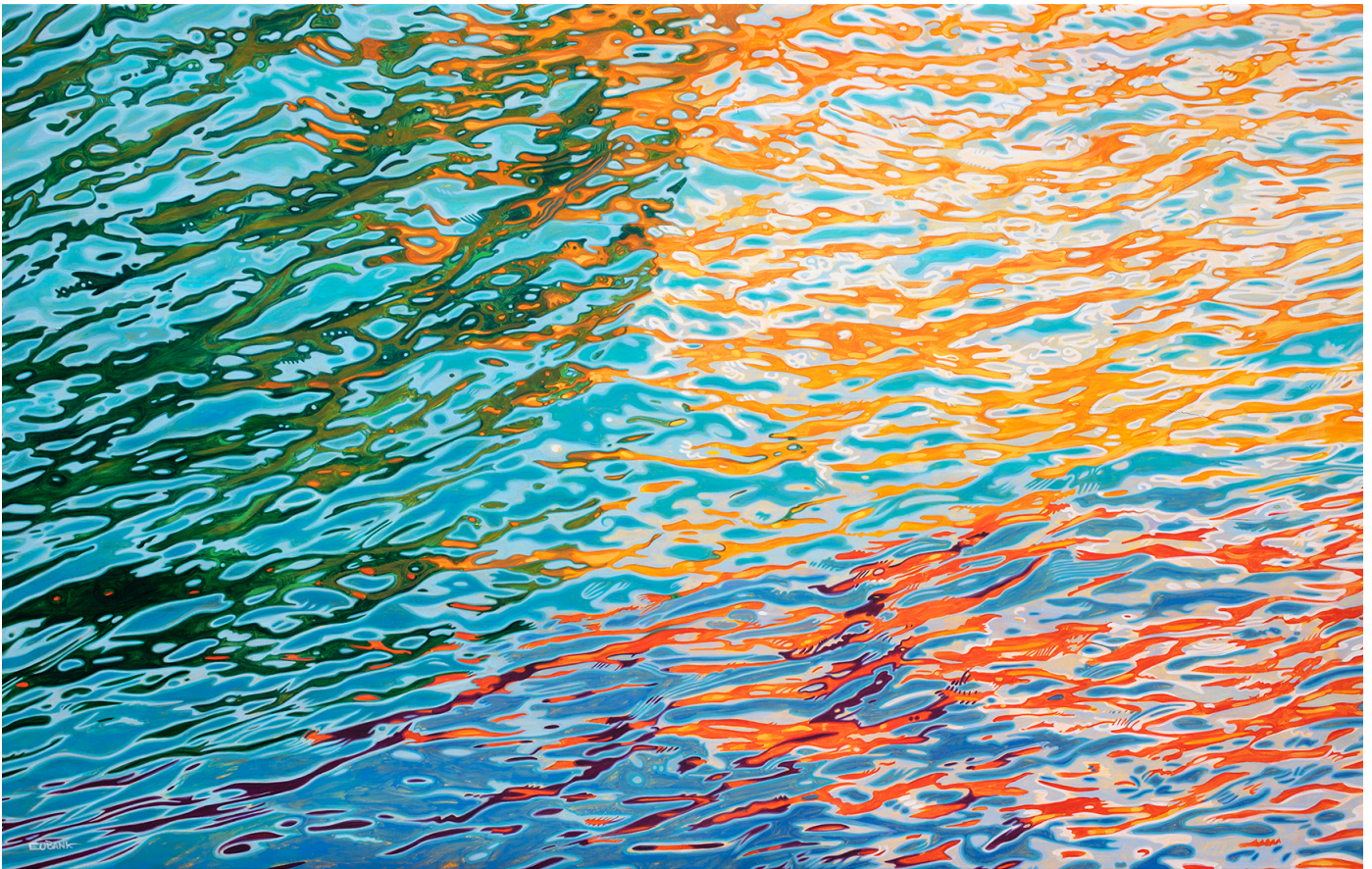
For water, this means entering into a dialogue with it—listening, observing, and even feeling its presence on the skin. More than anything, it means contemplating water's essential role in sustaining life and acknowledging the quiet, continuous labor it performs for the planet. A painting of water can shift perception, inviting someone to encounter it anew and to notice its presence more attentively in their daily lives.

Some viewers have reached out to tell me how much more they see water after experiencing my work, and this is the greatest compliment. If one person leaves the gallery with an expanded appreciation of water, I will be satisfied.

The opening reception is Saturday, August 8th, 6-9pm. The exhibition runs through August 29th. Tickets are free. LAUNCH Gallery is at 170 South La Brea Avenue, Suite 202, Los Angeles, CA 90036. For more information, visit [the LAUNCH Gallery website](#).



River Dee Llangollen II, oil on linen, 32x26 inches



Santa Cruz Island VII, oil on linen, 42×46 inches

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