

Danielle Eubank

When Danielle Eubank finished her Master of Fine Arts at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1994, she was on the fast track for a career as an interactive media artist. One of the first students studying interactivity and digital art, Eubank was well-prepared for the incoming explosion of the world-wide-web. Non-linear digital storytelling, as Eubank puts it, or the act of clicking we now know so well, became the artist's playground—that is, before she fell in love with painting.

Thriving in the early beginnings of the world-wide-web, Eubank became one of the first website designers, even designing the first corporation-wide website for the BBC. However, the artist's increasing affinity for the physical, tactile experience of canvas pushed her to paint. "At a certain point, I really missed canvas and getting my hands dirty," recalls Eubank. "I gave up my career in digital media in order to get some paint under my fingernails."

Despite working completely on canvas, digital media still fascinated and remained present in Eubank's work. "I'm lucky in that the thing I was involved with

originally is just part of our everyday lives now," she said. Trained to think like a graphic designer, Eubank became hyper-conscious of the compositions of her work. She explains:

"My work is non-linear. What I mean by that is that I don't paint narratives or stories. It's more about the formal, non-linear emotive expression, which is similar to how a graphic designer might think about it."

But Eubank doesn't just paint for fun—she's spent twenty years sailing across the world on expeditions with one overarching goal: to capture and paint every single ocean on earth. Started in 2001, her project One Artist Five Oceans is ongoing. She is currently in the process of painting her final ocean, the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica.

"My project is about the relationship between oceans, people and oceans, the historical background of this relationship, and the personal history of it," Eubank says. "I want to get people to observe, stop and think about what is around them. With this, I hope they will be more likely to act."

Eubank did not begin painting water. When her

Exploring Water and the Environment through Painting



Eubank, Danielle. *South Africa*. 2011. Oil on linen. 48 x 42in.



and a friend traveled through Spain in 2001, Eubank set out to paint the Doñana National Park. Determined to paint the Iberian lynxes and well-protected flora and fauna, the artist was disappointed to find out that the area was protected and inaccessible to public hikers. Eubank found herself stuck on the beach, unable to go inland.

"I sat on the beach for days with my back to the ocean, just painting the dunes," the artist remembered. "I could not bear painting water. It seemed trite, and it seemed cliché, and really just very hard since it's constantly moving." After three days of solely painting dunes, the artist finally decided to turn around towards the ocean.

Reluctant to do so, Eubank came up with a particular way to render the water. "I finally confronted the ocean and had a little conversation with it," recalled the artist. "My first painting was basically dunes with just a very little corner of ocean in it." After her first painting of the water in Spain, Eubank got in a bad bike accident, falling down a mountain. Unable to carry on with her friends, she found herself convalescing in a little fishing village for the next two months.

"It was just me and the water. I was by myself for two months, so that's when I really got into the idea of painting water," she says.

Two years later, Eubank was asked to join the Borobudur Ship Expedition as the expedition's artist. On board she painted the Indian and Atlantic Oceans and began her project: One Artist Five Oceans. She has since been on three more expeditions: the Phoenician Ship Expedition, an expedition in the High Arctic, and most recently an expedition to Antarctica. These expeditions have allowed her access to all of the world's oceans.

Eubank employs the formal elements of abstraction while painting her works, yet, for her, the paintings also look to consider humanity's tangible history with water.

"We need to take responsibility for what we have done to the water. We have created an awful mass of

pollution in water all over the world. We need to clean that up, and that is part of humanity's relationship with water," Eubank says. In regards to her purpose and goals in painting water, she proclaims that she's an environmentalist, and that she centers herself in issues of climate change. "I want to get people to observe, think and feel about what they are seeing."

I couldn't help but wonder what Eubank thought about the fashion industry and its impact on water. There's no doubt the global industry is making strides, but it has a long way to go. This year, Zara told Vogue it would make all of its garments out of sustainable fabrics by the year 2025. Also this year, French President Emmanuel Macron debuted a 'Fashion Pact,' which frames objectives for the fashion industry as it attempts to reduce environmental impacts; currently, 150 brands have signed on. Part of this pact involves preserving the oceans, namely reducing single-use plastics.

Still, Eubank has several pleas for the fashion world. One of the most harmful effects of the industry that often goes unnoticed is the presence of tiny bits of plastic in almost everything—from fastening labels to packaging. She explains: "These are the tiny pieces of plastic that are not recyclable and make their way unassumingly into the watershed."

According to Eubank, there are little things that can be done every day to help save our oceans.

"Washing clothes in cold water is just as clean as warm water and uses less energy. By hang drying clothes, your clothes will actually last longer and look better, as well as use less gas and electricity," she says. "Sometimes people feel guilty, feel like it's a sacrifice, or really just don't think they can make an impact. There are things we can do every day, and most of them are free.

"I want people to know they can affect change. We can each make a difference."

Eubank's exhibition with Michigan Medicine's Gifts of Art program recently culminated, but you can view the entirety of Eubank's work on her website: www.danielleubank.com.

By Alana Valko

Layout by Mackenzie Schwedt