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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2010

Betsy Eby: Vashon Island Washington

Lynette Haggard's Weekly Artist Interview



Betsy Eby

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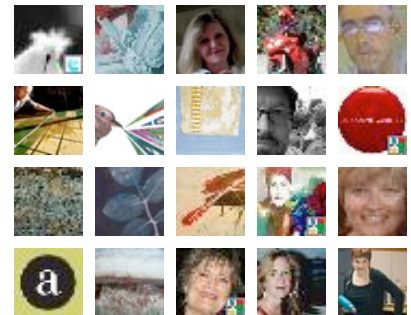
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Lynette Haggard (LH): Can you share with my readers a little about yourself?

Betsy Eby: I am a painter and classical pianist. My family is native to the northwest. My great-grandparents and grandparents were postmasters and store-owners in Neah Bay, Washington, an Indian Reservation at the farthest northwestern tip of the lower United

States. My mother grew up as the only white girl on the reservation. I was born in Seaside, Oregon, the end of the Lewis and Clark Trail. When I was a girl I idolized Wonder Woman and Sacagawea. My ancestors were tough, pioneering and entrepreneurial.



LH: Where did you grow up and what were there any early influences on your work?

Betsy: I was born in Seaside, Oregon and we lived in the country. There was an old forest behind my house, a swamp and a stream. We had two cows named Hubert and Huberta, pet ducks, and a cat named Phoebe Eby. My dad built us a swing out of old growth timbers. There was an abandoned parade float in the skunk cabbage, and on that float we would make up skits and pretend we were on live tv. There were birch thickets and buttercup fields around our house. My mom and dad would walk the promenade along the Pacific Ocean, pulling us in the red Radio Flyer. The sea air got in me at an early age. My entire adult life I've lived either on or overlooking the water. Growing up in the moist, dewy environment of the Pacific Northwest informed my senses. And I always had a love for the silvery bark of birch trees. I was a self-sufficient kid and liked spending time alone observing. At the age of eight, my father was transferred to the suburbs of Portland Oregon. I remember the move being traumatic for me. Everything in the beige suburban neighborhood looked the same, and houses were on a grid. Like a tree frog in the desert, I spent my life bereft for the natural environment that suited my temperament. My paintings are an extension of that ongoing resolution.

ABOUT ME



LYNETTE HAGGARD

I'm fascinated by surface, line and color. When I work, I try to explore the tangible and the familiar, and the unexpected

surfaces that happen along the way.

Visit my website at LynetteHaggard.com

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

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▼ 2010 (56)

▼ November (1)

[Betsy Eby: Vashon Island
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▶ October (5)

▶ September (5)

▶ August (6)

▶ July (4)

▶ June (16)

▶ May (5)

▶ April (3)

▶ March (3)

▶ February (4)

▶ January (4)

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Variation on Bach's Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue— 2010

Encaustic on panel, 36 x 58"

LH: Did you receive any formal art training? If yes where and what did you major in?

Betsy: My degree is a BA in art history. I began playing classical piano at age 5 and that is what occupied my childhood. I painted and drew and spent hours alone drawing self-portraits in my room. My mom enrolled me in a still life painting class at the local college when I was 14. I won third place in junior high art class for my rendition of a pastel Unicorn. When it was time for me to go to college, my family discouraged studying art or music, probably for fear it wouldn't prepare me to make a living. But after a year or so of general studies, I gravitated back to the arts and claimed my major in art history. My emphasis was in Greek/Roman as well as Asian.

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Variation on Saint Saens' Aquarium—2010

Encaustic on panel, 42 x 70"

LH: At what point in your life did you become interested in making art?

Betsy: I was in a bad car accident my junior year in college. It put me in bed on and off for about a year. It was at that time I became obsessed with making art. Neurologists claim that head trauma can alter brain chemistry and suddenly spark creativity or musicality. My head went through the windshield, even though I was wearing a seat belt. I can't explain it but that event altered the way I viewed the world. I began painting, reading all books on and by Jung, Nietzsche, Frankel and alike and absorbing all the classical music I could. I suddenly had an insatiable creative appetite. A couple years later, I had a visitation, or whatever that is, when a voice told me that what I was supposed to do with my life was to paint paintings that would be respites from chaos and that would elevate consciousness. I try everyday to do that in my work.



Variation on Franck's Panis Angelicus—2010

Encaustic on panel, 36 x 58"

LH: Was there a certain point when you decided you were primarily an artist?

Betsy: From birth, I knew my sensibilities were different. I always felt like an alien. It was in my twenties that I knew I was primarily an artist. No matter what kind of odd job I was doing to make a living all I could think about was going home to my basement studio. I'd paint all night. I basically taught myself to paint. Living in any other shoes than an artist's shoes felt disingenuous to my temperament.



Variation on Saint Saens' Danse Macabre—2010

Encaustic on panel, 42 x 70

LH: Can you describe bit about your work in general. What is your media? What is your current work about?

Betsy: My paintings are lyrical abstractions, capturing rhythms and patterns found in the organic world and the musical world. The medium is wax and pigment. I paint with knives, some brushes and a blow-torch. My last exhibition, which was in New York September-October of this year, was entitled “Scales and Measures” and each painting was titled after a piece of classical music. This is what I’m continuing to paint about – the musical world made tangible.

LH: Where do you live now?

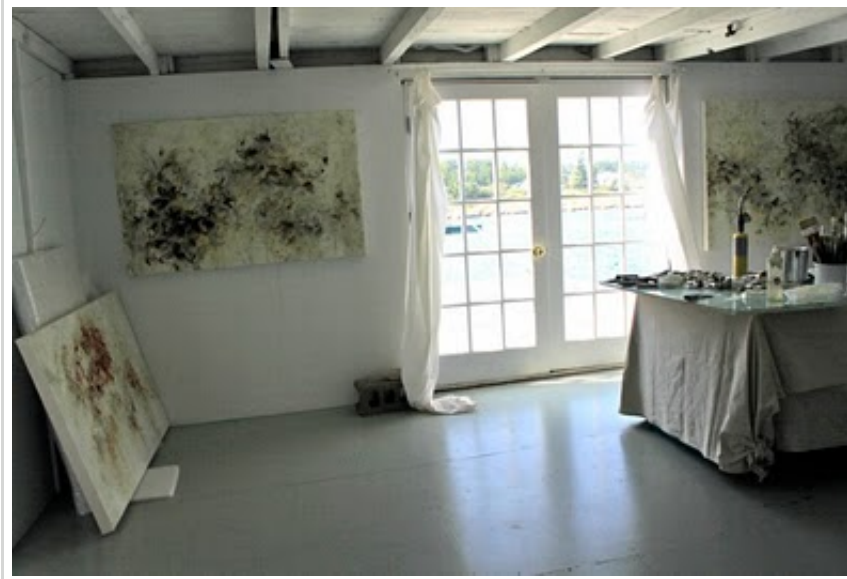
Betsy: We have three homes. Wheaton Island, Maine, a private island where my husband, painter Bo Bartlett, and I live and work 3 months out of the year. It is 24 miles off shore in the open Atlantic where there is nothing between us and Portugal but wide open sea. Our place on Vashon Island, WA, west of Seattle, is on 12 acres. It sits high on Inspiration Point overlooking Mt. Rainier, with walking trails through the forest and shoreline, a koi pond, gardens, and Javanese tea houses. And we have Bo’s childhood home in Columbus, Georgia where we go for short stays in the winter and spring. I have studios in all three locations.



Wheaton Island, Maine studio



Eby's studio in Maine



LH: What is your workspace like?

Betsy: My studios have large work tables because my paintings must be both horizontal and vertical when I paint them. Ventilation is important, so all my studios have cross breeze or exhaust fans.



Eby's west coast studio in Washington



Eby's studio in Georgia

LH: Are you involved with any arts groups or communities? If yes, what do you gain from that affiliation and what do you contribute to it?

Betsy: I feel like my peer group of artists and my husband's peer group of artists all over the country is my community. Wherever we travel we meet amazing people and have the fortune of spirited friendships – it feels like a giant extended family.



Variation on Debussy's Girl with the Flaxen Hair—2010

Encaustic on panel, 42 x 70"

LH: How do you develop a sense of community with other artists, and how do you support your art colleagues?

Betsy: Because my friends are mostly painters and sculptors and professional musicians, we are all involved in our independent practices. But we all need connection. I try to show up. Look. Ask questions about their process. Be open and genuinely care about other people's lives and well-being. I've never been good at small talk over tea – I've never been that kind of person. My friendships are usually formed around work. If the chemistry is right, friendships develop over time.

LH Describe how you work in your studio. How do you get "in a groove" and what inspires you?

Betsy: Working in my studio is a very physical practice. I wear a respirator and gloves and a very wax covered apron. I'm pouring and torching, moving paintings back and forth. Because my painting process is intuitive, I think it must be like a composer creating a score note by note all in service to the whole. I listen to classical music as I work (as long as it is not a piece I am studying at the time which can be distracting).



Eby at work

LH: Do you ever get stuck with your work and how do you remedy this?

Betsy: I try and recognize the moments when all things are really flowing and paintings are fortunately composing themselves, and I meet them with gratitude. This is flow – when it all feels like poetry. I can't recall being “stuck”. It's not a word I use. I can say that there are times when I recognize the need for incubation and replenishment in order to feed the whole cycle of creation. And I definitely recognize in hindsight when some works were clumsier than others as I was trying to work things out. But when that happens, it's all in service for the development of the next thing.

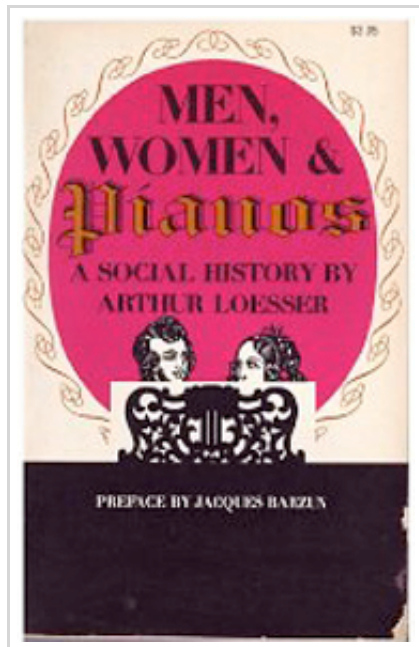
LH: Do you have particular habits that you think support your art practice?

Betsy: To be in flow with my work is to be in flow with life. All facets should be nurtured and balanced. One to three hours of music practice a day, yoga, walks in the woods, exercising, being outside and keeping an open heart in relationship to my husband and family. These are all important aspects of what keeps my flow in the studio. I also think it is extremely important to protect one's sensibilities. Our media culture can be quite toxic. I try and limit that. We don't have television in any of our houses and I never watch it. I drink a lot of water and eat a diet rich in vegetables and wild caught ocean fish. I

don't eat sugar or white carbs. This sustains balanced energy throughout the day for all that my life and painting process demands.

LH: What are you reading right now?

Betsy: I'm reading two books - *Men, Women and Pianos* – it's a history lesson on piano playing throughout the ages. And *Grapes of Wrath*.



LH: Do you have other jobs other than making art?

Betsy: No.

LH: Where would you like to be in 5 years as far as your art making?

Betsy: Chuck Close says that talent is a dime a dozen and that what makes an artist successful is a determined work ethic. I imagine that in five years my practice will be similar to how it is now: I will have my nose to the grindstone everyday, pushing the boundaries of my work and constantly reexamining the purpose of the work's message. I don't know where I'll be working, as I'm open to place, or what the work will look like. I'd hope for more increased involvement in museum shows and collections. Manifesting in one's 40's is very

different than manifesting in one's 20's. You want all the same things – but health, time and well being also become sacred.

LH: Do you have any upcoming shows that you'd like to mention?

Betsy: Solo show - [Winston Wachter Gallery](#), Seattle, May 2011

Solo show - [David Klein Gallery](#), Birmingham Michigan, October 2011

You can see more of Betsy's work at www.betsyeby.com

Thank-you, Betsy!

POSTED BY LYNETTE HAGGARD AT 10:15 AM

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