



BETSY EBY

Creative Thinking

For years Betsy Eby has painted ambient encaustic paintings that depict petals strewn about her canvases. Her more recent work is bolder and has a focus on the ocean. It is a change that was born unintentionally from recent experiences and reflections on the world around her.

About five years ago Eby and her husband, painter Bo Bartlett, moved to his hometown of Columbus, Georgia, as they opened the Bo Bartlett Center at Columbus State University. She began to reflect on the strife she found throughout the area in terms of race, religion and economics.

In early 2018 she was selected by Art in Embassies at the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Embassy Port Moresby to be a cultural exchange artist in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The mission,



Eby explains, was about female empowerment, and her goal was to spread the importance of creativity, art and culture. During her time there, Eby led a number of demonstrations and held lectures; she also had meetings with cultural diplomats and embassies and also did TV and radio interviews. The people of the region as well as the quality of the natural environment had an effect on Eby.

Every summer Eby and Bartlett head to their studios on a remote island 24 miles off the coast of Maine. The summer after her trip abroad was no different, except there was a month that Eby was there by herself. Spending that time alone surrounded by the sea continued to fuel the fire of her thoughts, and the new series of works unfolded.

"It wasn't that I set out to do a political statement, but I just found that this work birthed itself. It was born itself because of everything I was thinking about," she says. "I was reflecting on the natural world as a mirror to the health of our collective consciousness globally. I was thinking about the #MeToo movement and female empowerment, and the sea I feel connects to a

female force and Mother Nature."

In many of the new works, Eby paints the water as it meets the horizon line—where waves brush against the sky or the shore. In others, such as *Beyond the Sky*, it seems as though the view is underneath the water or of a vaporous space. Eby is very much at home with the ocean theme, not only because of her time in Maine, but because she was born in the Pacific Northwest and was influenced by being raised in that area.

"On multiple levels the series speaks to the idea of being at the threshold of things and the meeting of elements. David Whyte talks about it and John O'Donohue—the idea of the beauty that is at the threshold of things," Eby says, who continued her own ideas of the topic in the new paintings.

The series will be on view in the exhibition *I AM OCEAN* at Winston Wächter Fine Art in Seattle through January 30. ●

Winston Wächter Fine Art 203 Dexter Avenue North • Seattle, WA 98109 • (206) 652-5855 • seattle.winstonwachter.com

1
Betsy Eby at work in her studio.

2
Glacial, encaustic on panel, 30 x 70"

3
Beyond the Sky, encaustic on panel, 48 x 60"

4
The Gale, encaustic on panel, 36 x 48"



3



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