

Layers and Depths of Color: The Art of Eva Faye

Color plays a central role in Eva Faye's paintings, as she builds layer upon layer of paint to create richly hued fields shot through with shadow and light. Following a decade of focusing painted works on cut vellum that emphasized her interest in dualities of light and shadow, positive and negative space, she recently returned to painting on canvas. In these works, Faye extrapolates on the nature of perception, creating pools of luminescent color that are simultaneously immediate, referential, and introspective. Drawing our eyes inward, these works resonate with imagery and rhythm, and are replete with abstract allusions to the natural world.

Painting, for Faye, is a process of intuitive discovery. Her recent works in the series "The Paradox of Memory" (2020-2022) and "Blue" (2023) are, she says, "a paradoxical type of memory that is borne through intuition and physical experience." For her, the paradox is rooted in the vagaries of memory function—how different people remember in different ways, and how "memory in a way sometimes also protects you."

This paradox gives Faye space for discovery, a pathway to recognizing how memory can provide a platform for allusion, intuition and changing perspectives. "It has to do with starting from somewhere," she told me, "and coming out of the works on cut vellum, I started painting layers and incorporating the cuts back into the paintings. And I also see all the layers that I'm doing with the different colors as some sense of memory. I recognize something that comes back to me, and then if I feel like it looks right, then I can continue." These layers and depths are akin to the stories she tells herself as she is working, each layer representing a psychological state of being. As one layer builds from the color below, each element of the field melds into a cohesive whole.

Faye began the "Paradox of Memory" at the beginning of the pandemic lockdown. Moving full time from New York City to her home in Bridgehampton a couple of years before, she had become much more aware of and attached to her natural surroundings—a feeling deepened by her "desire to take root." As a result, *The Paradox of Memory No. 3* (2020-21) and *The Paradox of Memory No. 5* (2021) reference both the structures and the colors of the earth.

At first glance *The Paradox of Memory No. 06* (2021) reads like an underwater view of a pebbly creek bed, partially illuminated and partially in shadow. Circle patterns have long been a staple in Faye's visual toolbox. Here it is, in her words, "a way of getting some kind of organic pattern or breaking up the space. And that, to me, creates these fields of color and form that I'm interested in. It's a sensory thing for me, too, even sometimes when I close my eyes. Or you have that moment where you see light, or you see something and there are all these circles. I make up my own patterns, like a biomorphic natural system. I don't feel my work is geometric in a mathematical way. It's more my response to organic nature. Even when I make the patterns, it's intuitive."

This is not to say that Faye is unconscious of what she is making and how she is doing it. On the contrary, her working process is deeply rooted in solid formal understanding of the materials and techniques she uses. The physicality of application of paint onto wood panels or linen primed with rabbit skin glue are rooted in old master techniques that she brings decidedly up to date. But it is intuitive. As she says, "There's a lot of trial and error in my work.

There is a living image that all of a sudden exists in the painting. When I start a painting, I don't know exactly where it's going to take me in the end."

The Paradox of Memory No. 15 (2021-22) is the last of the Paradox series and the gateway into "Blue." In this painting Faye takes full advantage of the luminous quality inherent in this historically highly prized pigment, sought after and revered, and the most expensive pigment ever used, truly worth its weight—or more so—than gold. The word ultramarine derives from the Latin *ultra*, meaning beyond, and *mare*, meaning sea, an etymological happenstance that has meaning to Faye. "Beyond the sea could also be the sky" she said. "It could be space; it could be part of the elements."

Like the allusion of pebbles in a stream in *The Paradox of Memory No. 06, Blue Nights* (2023) takes its narrative roots in Faye's memories of the refractions of undulating light through water. As intuitive as it might be in bringing a painting to fruition, the process of getting there is a combination of accident and control: Faye works her way through a series of actions to bring her image to life. Working flat on the floor or a table, she pours layers of thin veils of paint, using stencils of her own making to bring images up through the skeins of paint.

Coming Through Blue (2023) is a prime example of this technique, where the white light emerging from the blue grounds combine with imagistic patterns to create a visual penumbra. Faye's use of stenciled patterns varies from painting to painting, depending on the type and level of movement she's after. In contrast to openness and light emanating from the center of the picture plane in *Coming Through Blue*, Faye created an inverse atmosphere of dense layers in *New Blu* (2023).

These contrasts show the breadth of Faye's approach to image making and her desire to create conversations among and between her works of art. Each functions alone as a kind of tone poem; taken together they create an overall narrative that moves from theme to theme. What Faye has accomplished in the *Paradox* and *Blue* paintings is a series of timeless moments that are rooted in physical, organic nature and the metaphorical space of emotion.

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