



JRB ART AT THE ELMS

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JRB ARTIST TALK WITH BETH HAMMACK

As many of you are aware JRB Art at The Elms either hosts demonstrations and/or talks with our featured artists in conjunction with their exhibitions. This year due to health concerns surrounding Covid-19, we moved our Artist Talk with Beth Hammack online.

Beth has shown in our Gallery for 12 years and is the only artist we represent who has an annual show. Beth received her degree in mathematics from the University of Oklahoma where she enrolled in almost as many art classes as math classes. She has been an educator, an interior decorator, and even designed a line of jewelry. But her passion is painting, and she has done that almost exclusively for the last several years.



Beth Hammack



Joy Reed Belt

JRB: Good Morning Beth. Thank you for sending me images of your work. It's always exciting to view new work. What is the title of this show?

BETH: "The Way Things Appear"

JRB: Ah, that title must refer to the bits of realism that I see in this new body of work.

BETH: My early art career in my twenties was in total realism – portraits, still lifes, and classic landscapes. I am enjoying the opportunity to revisit that early career interest in a unique way of my own. There is a term called Abstract Realism that has coexisted quietly without having to be all Realism or all Abstract. I like that challenge as I continue to develop, it is one of the hardest challenges for any artist. It's a tough assignment. Most people don't know, but when I start a painting I will often start with a charcoal drawing usually of people but it could be a still life or real landscape and in the process of applying paint an evolution starts that can make various pathways until there is an ultimate resolve of good composition, feeling, and inspiration. The journey is to paint, then adjust, cover to some degree, add, etc. For me it's a loose creative risk-taking proposition that can evolve into a lot of layers of paint and lots of inferred objects thus the *real exists* sometimes under or on top of the abstracted spaces.

Richard Diebenkorn, one of my favorite artists, said "Basically, there is nothing I've ever painted that I wasn't willing to cover up..." That resonates with me because it's the journey, the "struggle" as he calls it that brings value to a painting. It certainly isn't about *perfection for me!* It's more of a mood, an excitement at the resolve, that I feel transmits to the viewer. And remember it IS about the viewer after all.

JRB: What was the inspiration for this new body of work?

BETH: My style of abstraction has always reflected what I call "blurred imaging." My pieces may or may not be what they "appear" to be, thus the title. I intentionally work at painting *implied* stories or landscapes or people. One goal is to encourage the viewer to try to fit the pieces together in a language that is relatable to them. Having viewed a lot of art in my lifetime, I personally enjoy art that can keep me engaged and intrigued as to its meaning. I pause and enjoy the art more over time. Some art is just so easy to figure out, I get bored. I don't want to be boring...

Picasso used to be totally amused when he overheard what others would say about his pieces! Most of which had nothing to do with what he had in mind – and that's okay as far as I'm concerned. Why? Art is about the viewer enjoying it long after I have finished painting the piece. My pleasure was in producing it in the first place. Paintings are kind of like children. You love them, raise them, and then send them off in the world hoping they can function on their own.

JRB: Do you sometimes feel tension between painting realistically and painting abstract?

BETH: Yes! But the tension is what I am after. There's excitement in tension and less resolved art. I like leaving some loose ends in my work. I think artists have a hard time *giving themselves permission* to leave loose unanswered sections of their work. Actually, it takes some confidence (and guts) to know you could do it realistically if you wanted to, but you choose the looser interpretation because it reads with more emotion. All great artists: Da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Degas chose the gestural somewhat unfinished feel in their wonderful drawings and paintings.



Beth Hammack, "Navigations II,"
Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 72 in.,
\$3,800



Beth Hammack, "Speedboats in
the Mediterranean," Acrylic on
Canvas, 48 x 72 in., \$3,800



Beth Hammack, "Cozumel," Acrylic
on Canvas, 48 x 72 in., \$3,800

JRB: How do you select your palette for a particular painting?

BETH: Admittedly, as you can tell from viewing my art, it's obvious I have favorite color palettes...white and off-white tints being top of the list. They say 80% of what we see is the sky and that is a lot of whites and blues. So I paint in that reference a lot. I have a rule that in general most all my active paint colors are a minimum of two to three colors blended. The human eye is drawn to a more sophisticated mix of random colors in lieu of straight out of the tube. As you can tell there are exceptions when I top a painting with straight out of the tube globs but there is a reason for that final effort.

JRB: So why do you paint so many whites?

BETH: Basically, I can't help myself and I'm just being honest. They are not pure white but tints of white in abundance. Whites make me happy like blue white skies do. Lately I have not wanted to paint sad paintings. This world has too much reoccurring darkness and I feel like my art can overcome the negatives. There is something mood lifting with a lighter softer palette. I've never tolerated too much power color on my canvas. The whites and off whites help mute strong color. That's always been my interior design mantra too...lots of off whites.

JRB: How would you describe the audience for your work?

BETH: First, let me say *thank you* for whatever or whomever audience I have been graced with after twelve years at JRB. Having a background in interior design, I've always known what I needed to absolutely make a room – and it was always the strength of the art. Original powerful art is the last bastion of individuality because it's one of a kind. My audience wants the unique. It's hard to know what to do with one big empty sheet rock wall. A large abstract can totally empower the room. I think people are looking for that boldness in design. Obviously, I have a ready audience with corporate buildings too since both scale combined with a pleasant neutral mood enhances the work environments.

JRB: Thank you Beth for discussing your art with me. Now I do have one final question. As you know we are living in very difficult times. Has the pandemic changed the way you think about painting or in how you paint?

BETH: Truthfully, we are all being changed one way or another with this once in a lifetime epidemic. Life is fragile and we are not always in charge of our destiny and that in itself is kind of scary. But there is good in that too. I feel fortunate to have day after day to just paint. So I paint, I paint, I paint. Now the downside is there are good painting days and not so good painting days but your mind is more on your art and not on what is happening around you. I have tried to take advantage of all the good that those reflective quiet days deliver to us. I read a lot, which helps my mind/muse expand which is good for my art. I also planned to keep this May/June show at JRB Art a happy one. We need happy things at this time. I hope the show reflects my optimism that “this too will pass...” meanwhile we should value each and every day.

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