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#### **Pour It On Me: An Interview With Elisabeth Condon**

I recently had the pleasure to hear a talk with the artist Elisabeth Condon. Realizing that there were several more layers to her and her work I knew that asking her to be this week's featured artist would not be enough. I had to dig deeper. This is what I found.

**Joseph Kendrick - Why is painting your preferred method of expression? Are you a painter first before an artist?**

Elisabeth Condon - No, I'm not—artist first. In school I was quite serious about video and sculpture, and later in the late 1990s/early aughts, I worked on many collaborative projects in which people responded to a theme or image over a finite time in a particular space. In fact, I just did that again earlier this year (2013). But, I always come back to painting. I need it, it fulfills something profound in me—likely the metaphor of mud or merde, a primal impulse. On a visual and intellectual level painting is the most limited and therefore challenging medium, with a long history that ups the ante. In a digital era, swimming in a tsunami of perfect images, is it even possible to paint in a convincing and interesting way? All of this said, “painting” can encompass a lot. There might have been a time when I was committed to large-scale oil painting and I no longer feel the hierarchical pressure of that. Morris Graves and Charles Burchfield are amazing artists, who worked in watercolor on paper.

**JK - Do you begin your paintings with planned drawings or are they more organic in their creation?**

EC - Totally organic. The drawings inspire me but rarely translate directly, unless there is a passage that really grabs me and I feel I must project it in a painting. But even then, the passage would function more as a scaffold for various textures and new forms rather than mimic the flavor of the drawing. There have been times when I wish it would, but that is like wishing something could be copied, and I don't even think a copy can be copied...there is always something different in a second encounter. The paintings start with pours, often, or a gesture that I want to make—they begin arbitrarily, even randomly—another way to say intuitively?—and when there is an interesting combination of visual information, a painting starts to form itself. That said, I do get very excited when I travel, and so do often work from the motif, abstracting from that as I go. With the most recent paintings, I worked from memory and sketchy online information about a club I'd visited in 1974...in effect recreating it.

**JK - You draw lots of inspiration from your enjoyment of music in relation to place. Elaborate. What do you listen to now? Where do you plan to go?**

EC - The default is Steve Reich's Music for 18 Musicians (1974-6), Boards of Canada and related music. Most recently I'm obsessed with Clams Casino's "Instrumentals" and Salem's "King Night" and play them over and over. I've also been listening to David Bowie, Iggy Pop, the Runaways, Mott the Hoople, Alice Cooper, Velvet Underground, the Beach Boys (Surfs Up and Pet Sounds), Joni Mitchell, Elton John, and Led Zeppelin (especially III and Physical Graffiti), all bands that I saw in concert and certainly played obsessively growing up. Of these many hold, but I have a soft spot for Iggy. I've been listening to these bands to conjure the 1970s in LA, so mind-traveled to a synthetic, memory-driven place assisted by scarce internet images and childhood photographs. Where do I go next: the Grand Canyon! For a month at the end of June...I cannot wait to explore it and think in terms of scale, striated surface, depth and scope it will absolutely impact my work.

**JK - In your later works you've utilized more pour and splatter techniques. Do you feel you are moving towards total abstraction? Does it intimidate you to create a work without a brush?**

EC - Earlier I'd balanced pours and imagery, but in the recent paintings was looking for a way to express the inspiration of 1970s glam rock working with glitter and mylar, which were new materials for me. Lately there has been less of a need to intercede with a brush, as I am interested in the balance between form and formlessness. But I still love brushes, and a desire for form may reassert itself. I've learned to work shorter but more frequent sessions, in Chinese landscape scroll painting there is so much rehearsal required for a momentary engagement, much like a sport or a performance. It's like working in a burst, whereas I see figure painting, for example, as a more sustained endeavor over time. At this moment, the speed and fluency of pouring feels right for how time moves, and spreads, and it also echoes the definitive images of our historical time such as 9/11 and the BP oil spill among others.

**JK - Our followers may be interested to hear some of your visual influences, like The Flintstones and Chinese scroll paintings. Are there other specific aesthetic inspirations? Discuss.**

EC - Rodney Bingenheimer's English Disco circa 1972-4 and the aesthetics of glam rock in general: glitter, jewels, leather, satin; clubs: black spray-painted walls, graffiti, small and gritty backstage rooms. The blue interiors of California swimming pools; bougainvillea, hibiscus, pine, and palm trees. Memories of my suburban LA bedroom: wallpaper, a closet with cutout images of David Bowie, white shutters slanted against the blazing sun. Places that take me back to LA with ocean, heat and white light: Marseille, Miami, Cadaques. The Norwegian pines at Yaddo, the low-lit hutongs at night in Beijing. Smaller storefronts inside of a storefront on the Bowery in New York, the north light in Brooklyn...all of these make their way into my sketchbooks and paintings, as well as the interiors of airplanes and cars on the road. When I show my plane drawings to a steward or stewardess on a flight they can recognize the airline by the drawing...

Another thought: in terms of formlessness/construction of paintings, I think this is an effect of place, as well. Florida humidity affects perception of form, as does Brooklyn bricks and mortar. When I am in China paint wants to be ink, but when I am in NY it wants to be substance. So I am aware that location will affect every part of painting, from palette to facture. I don't think it's just about painting, either—social mores, ideas, and interactions also vary from place to place.

You can find out more about Elisabeth and her work by visiting her website and the websites of her gallery representations.

<http://www.elisabethcondon.com/>

<http://www.dorschgallery.com/>

<http://www.lesleyheller.com/>

Interview by: Joseph Kendrick

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