

Artist Statement

Betsy Walton

“My paintings weave together symbolic objects, human figures, unconventional and vivid colors, geometric forms, washy textures and organic details. I have been deeply influenced by living with the landscape and weather of the Pacific Northwest, where I have lived for the last 16 years.

I have been exploring and developing my painting process and visual vocabulary for 20 years. I am interested in painting as a mindfulness practice. I approach my work with the goal of entering a flow state where I am able to get lost in the layers as I build the image and experiment with the forms and the content in the image.

Paintings feel successful and compelling to me when I am able to stay interested both visually and conceptually with a work over a long period of time. I like to create images that feel like treasure hunts of sorts, where there are nuances and gems tucked in to the image that can be savored over lots of encounters.

I enjoy creating images that pair contrasting visual elements together, for example, washy textures with sharp edged geometric shapes. Neutral colors with saturated color and highly refined more realistic representations against simple forms that are suggested, stylized or planes of flat color.

Likewise, when I am pairing figures and icons in these spaces, I seek to depict a mix of emotions, moods and layers of meaning. The images can feel both very happy, joyful and perhaps childlike or naive in their colorful expression, yet tempered with a bit of an edge of melancholy and/or evidence of the suffering that we all feel as humans from time to time.

The mindfulness approach I use in my painting is useful in capturing these complex blends. A part of my brain speaks to me in images. I try to allow this internal image communication system free reign to show me fragments of images as I work, and then I try to get those elements into the painting. I am trying to see with my minds eye what this part of my mind/self has to tell me about what I can't think or speak with words.

As the image progresses I work to toggle between allowing my mind free reign to drop in new components, and careful editing to try to shape the image into its clearest expression with the most visual delight I can create.

Individual paintings in my body of work are on a spectrum from more narrative and symbolic at one end and more abstract and non representational on the other end. I tend to zig zag a bit between these poles according to an internal logic that tells me what feels right for that day or that season of work.

As I have progressed as an artist and developed this way of working, I have started to deepen my studies of the various components I am sticking together in my paintings. I have been learning about what neuroscientists have been discovering about our plastic brains, deepening my studies of ancient myths and parables through various traditions from the Bible to Buddhist teachings and ancient Greece, and building a reference library of images of my local flora. When I was a student I spent a summer in Florence, Italy immersed in works from the Byzantine and Renaissance eras.

I am often surprised at what I am learning by making my work, and this keeps me moving forward and exploring. I look forward to continuing to craft images informed by the moment of making and my deep enthusiasm and appreciation for the complexities of our universes, both internal and external.”

- Betsy Walton