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Jeff Faust

American, b. 1952

Rowboats floating in the sky, drifting leaves, puffy clouds, collections of objects (sometimes including clouds) casting shadows in wall niches, and the mysteriousness of shiny spheres recur in Jeff Faust's work, which he labels "subtle surrealism." "I paint things that I want to see happen but can't in real life. I find gentle twists on reality comforting," he says. "I have been painting since I was in grade school. My work was big, bold, and graphic sometimes. But at an early age, this [subtle surrealism] approach appeared. I was searching. I never had anyone tell me how to paint, which is the way I wanted it."

Having grown up in the Southern California city of Claremont, immediately after graduating from high school, Jeff spent three months in England and then ventured around the United States. "In Portland, Oregon, I saw an ad for a carnival that needed help. I hooked up with a fellow who had a traveling go-kart concession and stayed with him for four years, traveling to state and county fairs and supermarket openings. It is a fascinating life when you are 18," he says. But he continued his pursuit of art. "My folks would send my art supplies to me by Greyhound bus," he recalls.

After returning to Claremont, Jeff met and married Jan. For 20 years, they lived in the Bay Area, but eventually returned to Claremont, where Jeff works from his home studio. "I am more than comfortable in a room in a house," he says of his workspace. "I don't need much. It is vital for me to be working where I live, because I can go into the studio for any length of time. I can see the work before I go to bed and figure out what I would like to do the next day. It's a standard-size room with canvases, easels, and paint everywhere. I don't have great northern light, but it is a very good working environment for me." On average, he spends seven or eight hours a day in his studio, with classical music or the local NPR station on low in the background. "I have achieved a good balance for painting long stretches of time and then backing off. Sometimes I just sit in my studio and look," Jeff says, noting that he regularly works on two or even three pieces simultaneously. "Oftentimes, a painting needs to rest," he explains. "I can work on it full bore. And if I step away from it for a couple of days, I approach it absolutely refreshed. It is very easy for me to move from one visual to another."

Jeff's art education came from looking through and reading books in his father's "art library." "I became really excited by a lot of artists that would seem natural, like Dali and Magritte. Miró was an amazing influence on me, but my work is nothing like his. I was just taken by the explosive vibrancy of his work. He opened so many visual doors for me and let me think freely. Renaissance paintings astounded me, and they do to this day. I didn't zero in on [that style], but it all added so much to the way I could think about things. "It doesn't take much to spark an idea," Jeff continues. "I have always been a walker and generally try to get in a couple of walks a day. I can pick up a twig or leaf and get ideas for paintings. I am bummed that I don't have another 17 lifetimes to do some of the pieces I would like to do."

Though he typically begins a painting with an idea, 90 percent of the time, he doesn't know what it will look like when it is finished. "There is a lot of changing my mind as I paint," he says. "Often, I just start putting paint on the canvas and it will take me somewhere." Among recurring elements are bird's nests, sometimes in precarious placement — a combination that represents both security and the fragility of life.

When Jeff and Jan lived in the bayfront town of Sausalito, boats entered into his catalog of items that he likes "to assemble." But his approach places them aloft, above the waves, and sometimes with sails made of feathers. "I love what it can mean for a lot of people," he says of the visual that can be interpreted in endless ways. In another twist on an ocean scene, his painting titled *The Traveler* shows an urn-potted tree in the water, land in sight, as though it was searching for promising ground.

"It is a wonderful concept to me that a tree has been roaming the globe at sea," Jeff says. "Even though I am not that interested in poems, I like to think of my work as poetic."

Statement

The process of painting is, for me, an attempt to integrate elements that reside in my mind into a visual poem. I feel a need to share these ideas in my mind, to make them visible.

I begin a painting with only a general idea of the composition. It might be a bird piece, or a bowl piece, or one of a series done with a common theme — such as the "Journey" pieces. I don't set up a scene and paint it. I paint mostly from the images in my head, although I have a few objects in my studio that I refer to, such as a feather or an old oar that I picked up one day on the beach. The journey to find the image really begins when I first approach the canvas. I don't know what the final result will be and it's sometimes the start of a fleshing-out process that can last for weeks. I have always painted with acrylics. The fact that they dry quickly allows me to make changes. I routinely change the way an object looks and it's not unusual for a painting to go through many color changes. Once the piece feels complete, I get deep satisfaction from absorbing it, thinking about it, finding its meaning for me — and hoping that it does the same for others.

There's a general theme to my work. I paint common objects — mostly found in nature — things that people routinely and unthinkingly pass by. Placing them in a painting creates an opportunity to look at them differently, perhaps more importantly, to see their vitality and presence. I generally show them in a state of movement to demonstrate the fleeting nature of impermanence of life around us. I want my work to cause people to pause and think. I may juxtapose objects in an interesting way, which results in viewers labeling the work surreal. I don't feel the need to have a label on my work, but I also don't object to the often-used term subtle surrealism to describe it. It's also sometimes labeled trompe l'oeil. I'm not trying to paint in this style, but realize that it's an unintentional result of my attempt at high realism.

I always find it interesting — and curious — that other want to know the meaning of a particular painting. I have two thoughts on that. First, I want the image to speak for itself. Second, what the image means to me isn't really relevant. I think it's presumptuous to think that my meaning is important. It's only important to me. The painting is there for other to pause, to think, to find meaning within the context of their own lives.