

JEF GUNN

Artist Statement

Since the 1980s, I've made use of found materials in my work. In the mid 2000s, I began taking ink impressions from lines, shapes and textures found in the street, sidewalks and walls. These papers were worked into encaustic paintings on panels.

Later, I began noticing that certain forms have an inexplicable presence. A hill, a rock, a drawing of a pig on a menu. They have a simultaneous gravity and levity. A letter or Chinese character can be executed with this certain quality. Or a drawing. So, did the person whose hand made the line or mark feel this quality? Maybe it's a chance occurrence. It can just as well be felt in a sound or a touch or a glance.

Maybe it's what architect Christopher Alexander calls "the quality without a name," which can be sensed in a portico, a doorway, a hallway or a bench. The quality is often found in traditional architecture, made by the old methods and forms. Clearly, I've felt it in a bowl or a vase. And often, in a painting or drawing. John Berger writes about certain paintings that have a face, which looks at you, as when you know that an animal is looking at you. There's a silence in such objects.

In the way of Zen, there is talk of the such-ness of things. Only this. It seems to be understood that everything has this such-ness; everything will eventually pass away and I'm thinking this quality is the expression of its simultaneous presence and absence. Is this quality in the thing itself, or in my being? How is this possible?

Smaller things began to gather in the studio: seed shells and nutshells, stones, wood, bits of iron. I've been taking their impressions in ink on Chinese papers. Later, they appear in encaustic paintings or collages on paper or panel.

Moving : Stilling

A painting is a rectangle with marks and shapes and colors. How on Earth can these marks and shapes and colors be said to mean anything? We're each moved by, touched by, natural forms, elemental forms, in the landscape. We find them meaningful.

Earth: low, below my feet. Mountain and Valley. Rock. Dense. Horizon.

Water: River, lake, ocean, rain. Life. Horizon.

Sky: Spacious, above me, heaven, vast. Horizon.

In a pub in Seattle in the 80s, I met a Scot. We talked long into the night over too much Guinness. Near closing bell, he asked "Wha' is it about a stone?" I responded with weighty adjectives like dense and opaque and heavy. He waved his hand, "Nah!...the fluidity!" My mind opened.

It's all fluid. All moving. Earth, Water and Sky flow with and against each other. As the world heats up, their interactions are all the more exciting and dangerous, in ways that outpace our ability to stay safe and comfortable.

To be still and to contemplate openly, to see movement and not grasp it. The mind moves just like earth, air and water. Without ceasing. The most concise and complete instructions for meditation go like this:

Body like mountain

Breath like wind

Mind like sky