

JOHN EATON

Conceptual Artist

By Jeanne Erlewyn

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John Eaton, who has never formally attended an art school, has always known he was going to be an artist, and has never deviated from that course. His single mindedness towards his career is reflected in his work. He says he has pursued the same goals for the last thirty years of his career depicting either man's struggle and liberation, or his search for himself and freedom.

Eaton's output can also be divided loosely into two categories. When he works with oil he depicts man's struggle for liberation, and when he works with a matte varnish using powdered pigments with charcoal and pastel, he portrays his search. The second media he describes as a visual poetic form and says that it's cerebrally oriented rather than eye oriented. In his paintings the human form is evident but never clearly defined. Horses and turtles are repeated themes. His moods are almost surrealistic and his forms seem to emerge and fade as you gaze at his work.

The action in the painting titled "The Bohemian" is represented by a speeding horse that is fleeing the establishment. To show the power of his emotions he portrays powerful, dark, stormy areas. Eaton explains, "This show the life of the bohemian in relation to the world and his attempts to escape the structures of the ordinary demands of life that can stifle him. An attempt is made to escape as the horse, which represents movement, flees and survives. It's all about treachery and survival, and reaching the light."

These themes are repeated in his work and show the artist's fascination with man's endless struggle and fear. "My themes are mythological, but my men and women are not gods they are simply man and woman."

He adds that in the painting "The Swimmers", he paints what he might notice when swimming in a lake. To him the lake and its contents symbolize the earth. It is ghostly and mysterious and endlessly interesting.

He feels that the turtle in the lake, with its hard outer shell and its inner warmth, is the symbol of survival; this fascinates him intuitively rather than rationally.

In the painting "Identity" Eaton illustrates his theme of man's search for himself. He says "The adolescent is obsessed with love and there are always other loves, the original love object is a memory. He is never one personality but is constantly searching and reaching for a new identity; casting off his present self and seeking yet another." He shows the developing adolescent fading and emerging with multiple personalities, and we glimpse repeating patterns. He explains further that his subjects are those we see throughout life without really focusing on them, so he doesn't



emphasize detail. He defines attitudes and personalities, yet his definitions are never clear.

There are paradoxes which can frustrate the viewer if he or she is looking for absolutes.

He says his drawings are important to him from an intellectual standpoint and he uses them to tease the viewer's eye. Eaton does not begin to paint unless he has a strong sense of what he wants to do. What figures and which feelings, whether it will be an animal or a human form, or have an expression of tenderness, vulnerability, fear or terror. "However, I never know how a painting will emerge."

This spontaneity sometimes gives the painting an ethereal feeling or can express violence. It is clear that there are dark feelings. "My great desire is to get the inside out, and I do so with great trepidation." Eaton's themes of power, turmoil and peril are dominants that are repeated in his works, again and again.

In his autobiographical painting "Dreams", he depicts a farmer (himself) working while he dreams of beautiful horse which he loves. The dreams loom larger than the farmer's reality in this oil. Obviously, his work is a natural for analysts and psychologists, who are among his best clients, as it deals with symbols and man's eternal struggle with him and the world around him.

Horse in Show Ring, mixed media, 40x36"