

JOHN EATON

Pictorial Uproar

By Dorota Kozinska

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You can tell John Eaton loves horses and skies. But behind his mysterious, swirling images lies an existential quest to depict man's struggle for self-affirmation and freedom, to "try to portray the drama of today". It's a goal this Ottawa painter has been pursuing for over thirty years.

Raised in an intellectual environment, with what he calls "a heady background", Eaton was drawn to art from an early age, finding in it the perfect outlet for his metaphysical wonderings. And although his works begin with an idea rather than a sensation, he does admit that he never knows "how a painting will emerge". "I have an inclination to take the ordinary and kind of magnify it and transform it into something more personally gratifying" says the artist.

In John Eaton's painting, delicately outlined horses appears as if molded from the clouds against which they gallop, their ethereal, gossamer shapes emerging from a menacing churning darkness.

Years spent living on a farm have provided the artist with a rich visual vocabulary, but his use of animal forms – horses, turtles – is allegorical and symbolic.

Horses represent movement in John Eaton's artistic lexicon and they guide the viewer's eye across the canvas, floating in and out of great expanses of turbulent skies. At times their bodies are a blinding, white flash against the sombre ochre and sepia background, at others they emerge dark and angry like portents of an apocalypse. Turtles and boats are the other symbols which appear in John Eaton's imaginary universe, but in some of his mixed media paintings there are no recognizable forms, only a shapeless energy wreaking havoc on canvas.

His art founded on classics – he studied marble sculpture in Florence, and speaks of being influenced by the philosopher Rudolph Steiner – all of which "encouraged the poetic inclinaison" which is behind his paintings.



This poetry of motion can be seen in the fluid gesture with which the paint is applied to canvas, as in the delicate smudges that transform a man's hair into a halo of colour in a work titled *Youth in Costume*, the face taking on the beatific look of Da Vinci's madonnas. An undeniably intellectual and profound man, he has, nevertheless, managed to tap into something atavistic, beyond words and culture, excavating a layer of psyche in which his oblique, ethereal shapes hold court, speaking to us in some universal tongue, at one recognizable and alien.

He considers his art as a form of therapy. "It lines up my thinking in a way", he says. "Art defies fate". John Eaton's paintings hold an endless fascination, inspiring deep reflection, while at the same time pleasing the eye. Impossible to classify, they at time verge on art brut, their emotional component on par with the spontaneous, gestural energy that permeates them.

Memory of a Show Horse II, mixed media, 48x60"