



Jeff Faust's Open Windows

by Currie Alexander Powers

PHOTO: DAVID ENGLISH

Many artists take a conventional path in their education, attending art school, college, university, or doing an apprenticeship with a master.

Jeff Faust joined the carnival.

His obsession with painting began in grade school. His parents—whose love of art is evidenced by their giving their children the middle names Manet, Cezanne, and Matisse—made sure there were always art supplies around, and their home was filled with books, many books about painters. Faust lived and breathed those books, poring over the works of Magritte, Miro, and Dali as a child.

His parents' encouragement was gentle, and though Faust's talent was evident early on, his father feared he would be molded or stifled under the influence of someone else and discouraged him from going to art school. So Faust taught himself to paint, brushstroke by brushstroke, looking to the masters as his guide. In high school, Faust was struck with wanderlust. He saw an ad for a carnival while hitchhiking around the West Coast, took the job, and stayed with them for four years, traveling from town to town, having art supplies sent when he needed them. His style grew in that setting, but it was a world of his own making, influenced by the carnival but not a documentary of his travels.



Arrival of Autumn Act I, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60"

Faust's paintings today are still lifes in motion. They are windows into a world of Jeff Faust's making. It is a beautiful world, filled with birds, boats, swirling leaves, and rolling, cloud-filled skies. But it is not a static world. Drama lives in the arrangements.

“His paintings are reminiscent of Magritte’s eerie surrealism and Dali’s odd juxtaposition of objects, soft light and colors, a story contained within that might have come out of a fever dream.”

Birds’ nests perch precariously on ropes, clouds float above vases, boats are made of leaves. “Birds are innocent witnesses of life,” Faust says. “Nests are fragile homes, and if you can survive a journey in a boat of leaves, you’ve come out ahead,” he says with soft laugh. Faust understands the world is a chaotic place, filled with too much loud noise. “Life is dynamic. It’s not smooth sailing every day.”

We need escape. He provides it.

Faust learned firsthand how in an instant everything can change. A close friend, while traveling in Italy with his small child and pregnant wife, was killed when a rock truck turned over on top of their car. The wife survived, but Faust’s friend, the



Sweet Home, Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 36"



The Coming Fog, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60"



Ten Minutes Before a Poem, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"

small child, and unborn baby were killed instantly. "Humans can endure so much," he says, but he was struck by how fragile life is.

We see that knowledge of fragility in his paintings, delicate objects exposed to the elements, small birds dancing on a wire while leaves thrash in the wind and the sky rolls with pre-storm madness. Wind and sky are prominent themes in Faust's work, and he gives them a drama and depth that bring them from the

background to the forefront. "When painting clouds you really have to release yourself," he says. He has clouds floating in bowls, in boats, above the head of a stately cow as if it were a bovine dream bubble. There is a passion for nature that Faust tries to capture when he approaches the canvas, and it is obvious that he understands the feral, untamable personality of the world outside his window. He doesn't try to control the moment he is inspired to capture. Rather, he lets it come to him unleashed.

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Three Sand Dollars, Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48"



Quiet Arrangement, Acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

“I have a starting point,” he says, “and I hang on for the ride. I don’t think about what will happen next.” He listens to classical music to create a mood and lets his mind float below the stream of chaos. “I have a fairly active daydreaming mind,” he says. His paintings do look like dreams, his way of rearranging the normal. He strives to “create a visual that doesn’t actually exist—but one that I would like to see. I can pick up a twig, and it will trigger a thought of an image as I would like it to be.” Faust allows himself a lot of freedom while working. “I change my mind a lot,” he says. Or more poetically, “You leave one fate only to arrive at another uncertainty.” His freedom is such that he has reworked canvases he’s gotten back from galleries. There is a wonderful sense of motion in his approach, that a scene can change.

Faust has described his work as “visual forms of the written word.” He sees his reoccurring themes of birds, altars, boats, and feathers as different chapters in an extended story. “The process of painting is, for me, an attempt to integrate elements that reside in my mind into a sort of visual poem,” he says. “I get deep satisfaction from absorbing it, thinking about it, finding its meaning for me—and hoping that it does the same for others.” ✓

A show of Jeff Faust’s work opens Tuesday, September 6, and runs through October 15, 2011, at Gallery One, located at 5133 Harding Pike.

A reception open to the public will be held Saturday, September 17, 6–8 p.m. www.galleryone.biz



In the Wind, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 36"