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“Painter of Water”

Danielle Eubank demonstrates at
S-T Art Assoc.



Jackie Houchin

Christmas decorations, the aroma of potluck dishes, and the promise of a fascinating art demonstration by a world-traveling painter brought out two dozen members and guests to the Sunland-Tujunga Art Association meeting on December 8.

Nancy Bearce introduced Danielle Eubank as “an oil painter and expedition artist,” describing her unique painting style as “capturing the essence of light and water on canvas.” Before the evening was over, members would hear of adventure on the high seas, anecdotes about a well-known bridge, and the process and techniques Danielle uses to create a painting.

Behind the artist, a large painting in its early stages was displayed – a lemony yellow background with squiggles and amoeba-like shapes sketched in charcoal. A few shapes were filled in with cream colored paint; others were shaded in pale rusty orange or outlined in brown. We would eventually “see” Danielle’s vision of the water beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, but before that, she had some storytelling to do.

As she talked about sailing on the *Phoenicia*, a replica of a Phoenician ship, circa 600 B.C. Danielle passed around photos, sketches, and small journals full of notes about light and color that she’d made at sea. “I prefer to sketch with paint,” she said when someone noted the colored sketches in a notebook. “If I use pencil, it gets too detailed.”

The *Phoenicia* sailed clockwise around Africa – a 20,000 mile voyage which took two years to complete. Danielle was with the expedition for only two of the twelve “legs,” but that was enough for her to finish fifty paintings for her London show last July.

Next Danielle brought out her painting travel kit. A sturdy piece of leather rolled and tied with strips of leather that a fellow expeditionary had made for her. Inside were sewn pouches for her brushes and palette knife. She unfolded a paint-stained apron that was tucked inside and tied it on. A small plastic box contained her paints (tubes of cool and warm blues, reds, yellows and browns, and white) plus a small jar of turpentine substitute, charcoal, and a few Q-tips.

“I always paint on linen,” she said, “and I use the biggest brush I can get away with so things are loose.” As she mixed a creamy yellow, she explained how she begins her paintings with a concept, then decides on the form and shapes, and lastly on the subject matter. “I know this is backwards to how most artists paint.”

Her idea for this painting came first from a piece of cloth she’d bought while on the expedition. She wanted the painting to have that feel. She decided on the colors – vanilla, espresso, blue, and burnt orange. Next, she sketched out the shapes and color patterns, and finally decided on the subject matter – the Brooklyn Bridge. That brought exclamations of surprise, as each person searched the painting for any hint of a bridge... or even the reflection of one.

“I’d recently been to New York,” she explained. “It was a weird cloudy day and it reminded me of that fabric. I took thousands of photos of the bridge, and then I looked up its history.” Referring her journal, Danielle told about the troubles the Roebling family had faced during construction. When the bridge was completed, a rumor circulated that it was going to collapse. To disprove that – and promote himself –

P.T. Barnum paraded twenty elephants across its expanse.

“They were so fascinating I had to include them.” Again we studied the painting’s swirls, this time seeing hidden faces – the three Roeblings, P.T. Barnum, and even an elephant! “This is the first time I’ve ever told anyone about the hidden things I put in my paintings,” she whispered conspiratorially.

Danielle then demonstrated layering and “scumbling” techniques, confessing that she never starts with the color that the painting will eventually be. “This yellow undercoat will make the blue and orange pop out later.” She estimated fifty layers to complete it.

Leaving the yellow painting briefly, Danielle demonstrated more highlighting and scumbling on a very “stripy” painting, representing the calm water of the Thames just before the oars are plunged in for the Henley Royal Regatta rowing competition.

As the evening wound down, Danielle graciously answered questions, and then drew the winning raffle ticket. Georgia Jung won Danielle’s original painting of the Seychelles.

Danielle Eubank, her husband Fletcher Beasley, and their two-year-old daughter live in a cozy home in the Tujunga hills. To arrange a studio visit, contact her at: danielle@danielleeubankart.com