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Painting the Oceans: All of Them

Susan Hoffman Fishman / 0

[Danielle Eubank](#) is an expedition artist and, as such, has dedicated the last 20 years to traveling and painting the world's five oceans (Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic, Southern and Indian). Eubank calls her inspiring and ambitious project, *One Artist Five Oceans*. She models herself on the expedition artists of the past, such as [William Hodges](#), who accompanied Captain Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Just as these earliest artists were the "eyes of the expedition," the ones who brought back the first images of a new world before photography became the medium of choice, Eubank too has created her own singular portraits of the oceans' "moods and emotions" for us all to see. Her goal is to encourage people to feel, think about and act on what is happening to the oceans and environment.



William Hodges, *HMS Resolution and HMS Adventure in Matavai Bay, Tahiti, 1776*

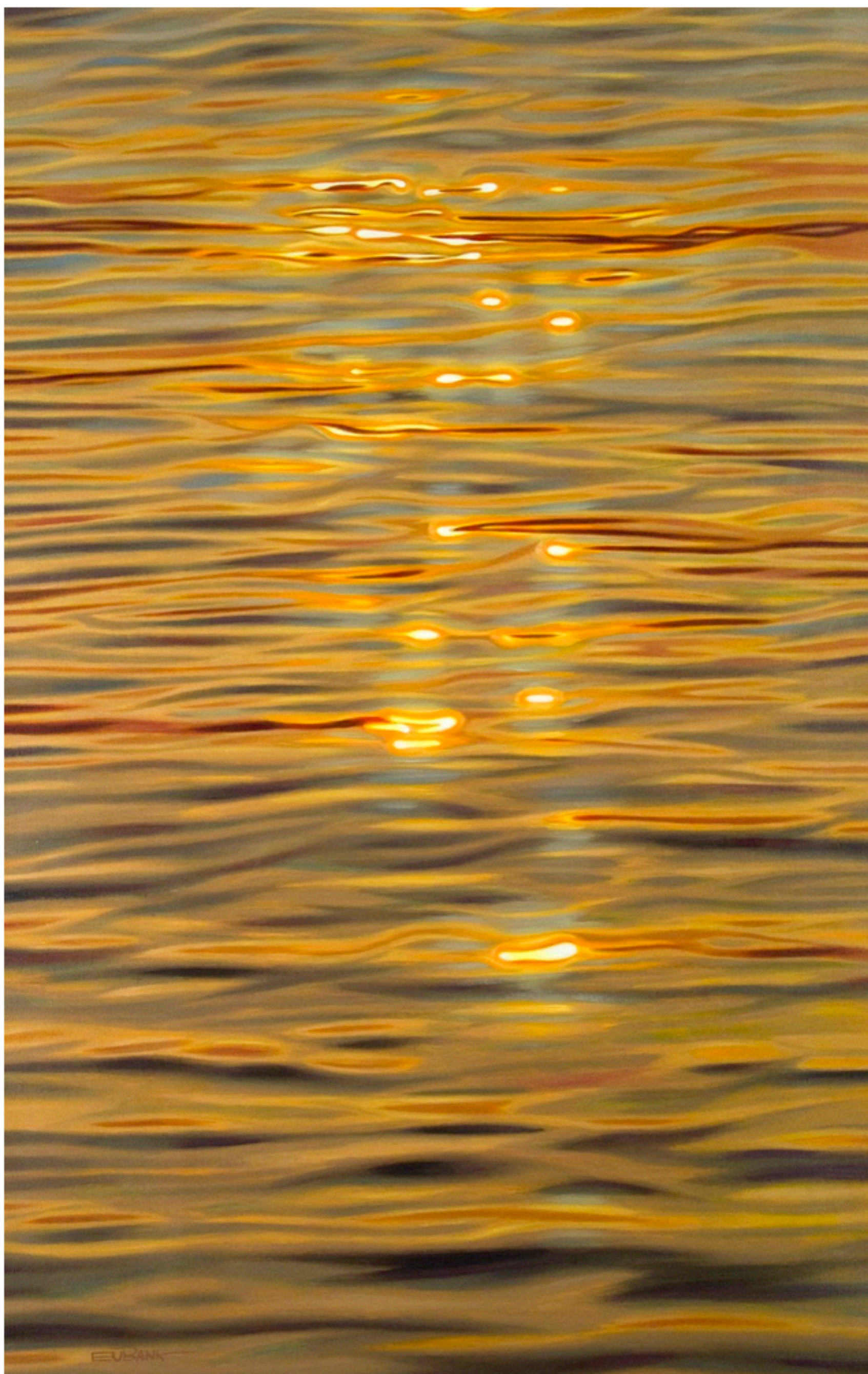
Origins of the Project

In our recent conversation, Eubank related to me that she started painting water reluctantly. Having grown up near Bodega Bay, California, she had seen her share of seascapes and had turned to painting portraits, landscapes and animals instead. "Besides," she said, "I felt that water was really hard to depict – it's constantly moving and how do you draw that in an original way?" In 2001, during a visit to the Doñana National Park in Huelva, Spain, where Eubank had been sketching the dunes for days with her back to the sea, she turned around. Forcing herself to draw the water, Eubank began what became a decades-long passion. As she worked over a number of subsequent days, observing the water more and more closely, she began to develop a visual language for water that became increasingly abstract and emotive.

The Expeditions

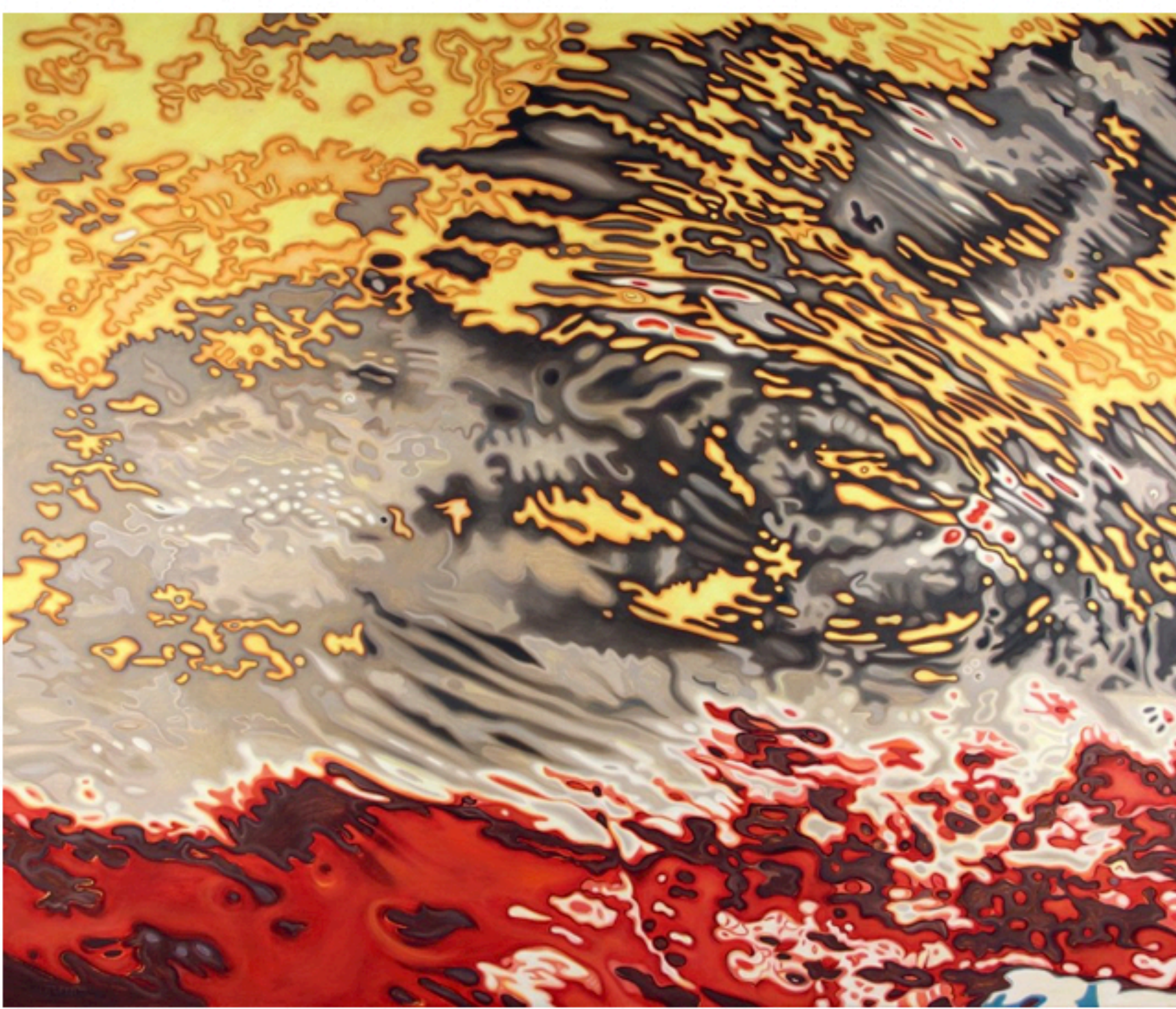
In 2013, on the strength of her growing body of water paintings, Eubank was invited to serve as the expedition artist aboard the **Borobudur Ship**, a wooden replica of an 8th century Indonesian trading vessel. From 2013 – 2014, the expedition sailed from Indonesia, across the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope and up the Atlantic Ocean to Ghana. Aboard the Borobudur, as with all of her voyages, Eubank would draw and photograph what she saw, and later, in her studio, develop a series of large-scale paintings based on these observations.

Of all of the oceans she has sailed, Eubank credits the Indian Ocean as her probable favorite. With its proximity to the Equator and the high level of pollution in the air, the Indian Ocean reflects a wide variety of colors, including the intense orange of the sunrises and sunsets, pale turquoise, ultramarine blue and purple. In Mozambique, Eubank visited fabric stores, which displayed the bright colors of the country's traditional printed cloth. Her paintings from this time period were highly influenced by both the varied color palette of the water and the local dress. Eubank considered the experience "transformative" and began thinking about traveling and painting all of the world's oceans.



Danielle Eubank, *Ancol XIII*, oil on linen, 44" x 28," 2008. The Borobudur Ship Expedition

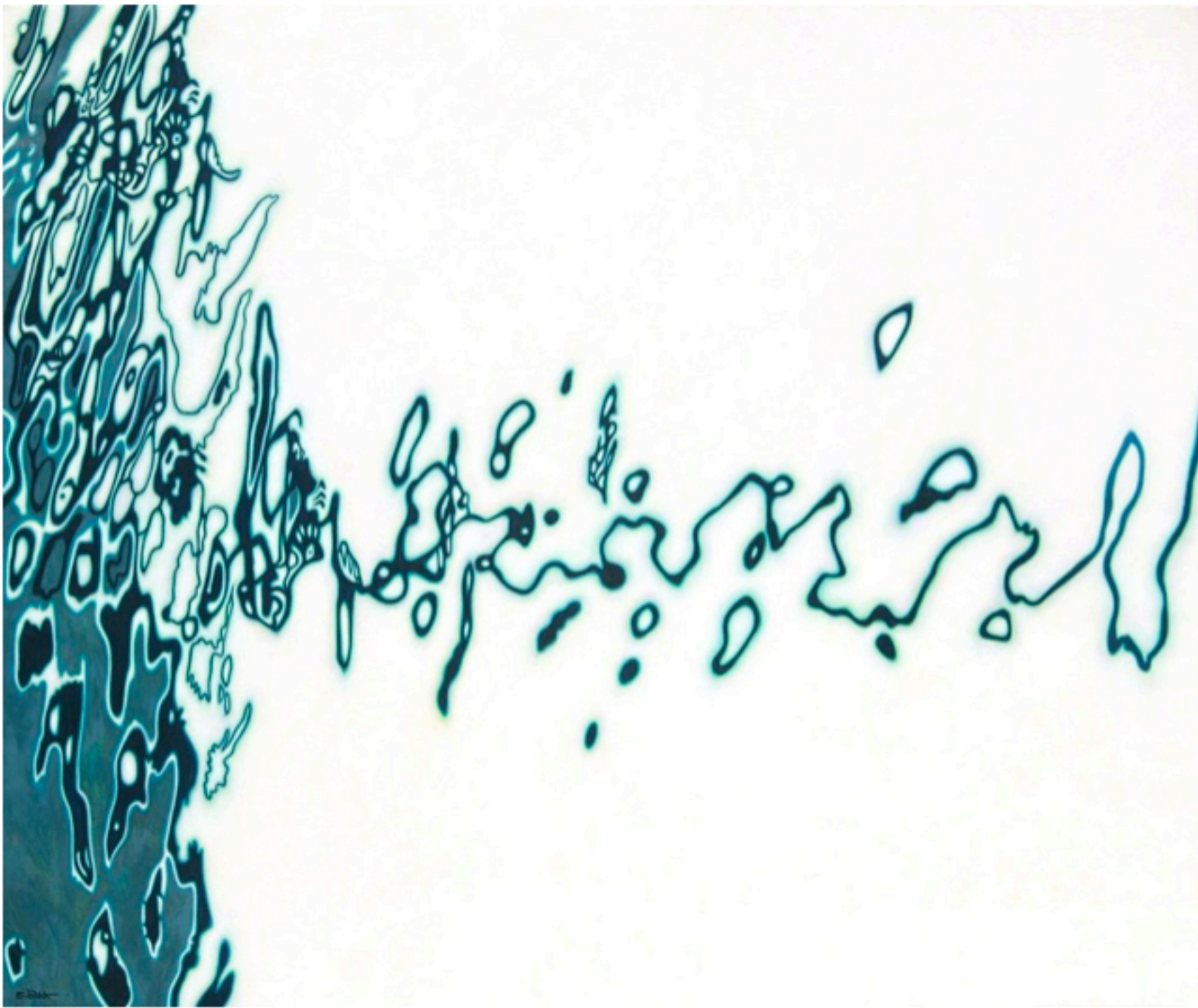
From 2008 – 2010, Eubank served as the expedition artist for **The Phoenician Ship Expedition**, a recreation of a 6th-century BCE voyage, which sailed from Syria, through the Suez Canal, around the **Horn of Africa** and up the west coast of Africa, through the **Straits of Gibraltar** and across the Mediterranean to return to Syria. The vessel was a replica of a 2,500-year-old Phoenician ship that circumnavigated Africa six centuries before the birth of Christ. Eubank's paintings from the voyage reflect the hot colors of Western Africa.



Danielle Eubank, *Mozambique IX*, oil on linen, 60" x 72," 2011. The Phoenician Ship Expedition

In 2014, Eubank traveled to the High Arctic aboard the *Antigua*, a [barquentine](#) tall ship. She was one of 27 artists, scientists and educators who made the voyage around the international territory of Svalbard, an Arctic Archipelago. The *Antigua* passed through a world of pale blue icebergs and "turquoise-cerulean ice calving from glaciers." To Eubank, the already abstract nature of the landscape was vastly different from the water and sky of her previous expeditions. Her challenge, as she described it, was to find a new way to translate that environment:

Normally, I deconstruct the physical forms found in water to create stacks of abstracted rhythms. In this case, the Arctic Ocean already looks abstract before I've had a chance to deconstruct it.



Danielle Eubank, *Arctic XI*, oil on linen, 60" x 72," 2018

Eubank achieved her 20-year goal of visiting and painting the world's five oceans in February of this year when she sailed through the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica. Although she has filled sketchbooks with drawings and taken numerous photographs, she has not yet completed the full body of paintings that will derive from this expedition. She is, however, currently exhibiting work from all five expeditions for the first time at the [Kwan Fong Gallery](#), California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California through August 1, 2019.

When I asked Eubank what she had learned from her journeys, she admitted that she had seen firsthand how

messed up the waters around the world are, how much less marine life there is now than even in the 20th Century; how it's really important that people have a way of protecting and feeding their families – without that, they can't possibly think about fixing the environment.

In answer to my question “what’s next?” Eubank responded that she will probably always be working with the topic of water and that she will continue to spread the message about the importance of reducing the use of plastic and fossil fuels that have had a devastating effect on our climate and our precious oceans.

(Top image: Danielle Eubank, *Arctic XII*, oil on linen, 72” x 116,” 2019. The Arctic Expedition)

This article is part of [Imagining Water](#), a series on artists of all genres who are making the topic of water a focus of their work and on the growing number of exhibitions, performances, projects and publications that are appearing in museums, galleries and public spaces around the world with water as a theme.

[Susan Hoffman Fishman](#) is a painter, public artist, writer, and educator whose work has been exhibited in numerous museums and galleries throughout the U.S. Her latest bodies of work focus on the threat of rising tides, our new plastic seas and the wars that are predicted to occur in the future over access to clean water. She is also the co-creator of two interactive public art projects: [The Wave](#), which addresses our mutual need for and interdependence on water and [Home](#), which calls attention to homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in our cities and towns.

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