

(standard) INTERVIEW

'attempting insight since 2010'



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## David Aylsworth



### **Can you briefly describe what you do?**

*I make paintings. Mostly they are paintings of a small number of simple shapes in pretty simple colors that have some sort of relationship to each other.*

### **What drives you to make work?**

*Going into the studio day after day is not a lot of fun until I have found the spark that interests me in a particular painting. Once that has taken hold, there are few greater satisfactions I get from just about any other activity in my life, and I can't wait to get back to working on a particular painting and seeing it to completion.*

### **Can you tell me something of your day-to-day working practices?**

*I put down a whole lot of streaks, shapes, and gestures of paint in various colors and configurations until something catches my interest enough to focus in more intently.*

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Until that time, I usually have eight to ten canvases of various sizes going at the same time, and I will go from canvas to canvas with a can of paint, making marks of no particular relevance on each one. Once I get interested in a particular one, I usually abandon all but that one for the duration until it is finished. Then I dab and daub paint on the rest until I get interested again. The absolute worst time is when I have a room full of white canvases, but I rarely am organized enough to get a new one prepared once I finish one and have 7 others in the pubescent stage. Once I think I have finished one, I am on such a high, I just want to continue bringing the others up to that same level.

My painting at the start is hugely gestural and expressionistic with a lot of goopy paint and sometimes disgusting colors until I think I see something going on that points to a direction. Lately, these directions get pretty hard-edged (or, as hard-edged as I can get without measuring or taping off areas) and the shapes get pretty angular as they point, prod, and run away from each other. I have this nascent belief that if I feel out a straight line on a shape, and paint it as sharply and cleanly as I can with my not terribly steady hand, that something more is transmitted through that process than if I measured and taped off the same line and shape. It's that something more that I can't really define for myself yet. Maybe it's something that I don't want to define for fear that once defined, it won't interest me anymore.

### **How long have you been working in that way?**

For my final project in school, I did a lazy version of geometric abstraction, but that seemed to lose relevance for me once I moved to Texas twenty years ago, so I started painting more gesturally and expressionistically, with a dash of goofy balloon animal type forms floating in and out of the slapdash paint. Letting the gestural layers become more angular and giving in to my desire to see flat and filled in painted shapes has been a pretty recent thing--probably in the past three or four years.

### **Which artists have had the greatest affect on your work?**

I guess you always think of the people who you've been thinking about most recently, don't you? Recently I haven't been able to get a particular painting by George Braque out of my mind. For clunky, socially awkward but distinctive shapes with personality, I think of people like Thomas Nozkowski, Arthur Dove, John Marin, Esphyr Slobodkina, Charles Burchfield, and Marsden Hartley. For sheer beauty and awe-inspiring painting, I love looking at Elizabeth Murray, Georgia O'Keeffe, Lawren Harris, Rockwell Kent, Grant Wood

### **What, outside visual art, informs your practice?**

Music. Predominantly Broadway show style music, but recently a good deal of jazz and slowly a bit of grand opera.

### **How would you like people to engage with your work?**

You always want to make something that is intriguing to look at. I would hope that people would look at the shapes and how they interact as practically living and breathing beings that have a quirky existence that mirrors their own. Most of my paintings are titled after some inner rhyme or line in a show tune lyric, and I always fantasize that someone as geeky as me about showtunes will see a painting, recognize the lyric, and have the song stuck in their head as a soundtrack while they look at the painting. I don't think it ever really happens like that, but it is what I fantasize about the ideal viewer of my paintings...

### **Have you seen anything recently that has made an impression?**

About a year ago, I saw an exhibition at the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem,

*Massachusetts of paintings, drawings, and photographs by people who had made expeditions to Antarctica. Lawren Harris, Rockwell Kent, Frederic Church and the like. Everything was figurative, but maybe because of the majesty of icebergs and aurora boreali, the figuration often came remarkably close to abstraction. I really got into the airtight, frozen and silent gravity and spiritual splendor of just about everything I saw there, and I've been trying (rather unsuccessfully) to bring those feelings into my own paintings back in my studio. Maybe it's the activity of painting itself that distracts me from that feeling of wonder and awe... when I'm moving around, flinging paint, or fixating on straightening a line, it's hard to sit back and be awestruck... but I guess that's almost getting back to your question about "what drives you to work?", isn't it?*

**Do you have anything exciting on the horizon?**

*Talking with you here has been the most exciting thing on my horizon in a long time! Aside from THAT, you mean? I was lucky enough to get a grant last year from the Artadia organization, so I will be having work in a group show of grant awardees in Chicago later this year. I've never shown any paintings in Chicago before, and I like the city a whole lot, so that should be fun. I'm also lucky to work with two galleries in Texas--I had a show with the Holly Johnson Gallery in Dallas last May, and am just starting to talk with having another with Inman Gallery in Houston sometime in 2012.*

*But, probably the MOST exciting thing for me is that after about two seemingly endless weeks of mucking paint around blindly and stupidly, I just started getting a glimmer of something that I think might lead somewhere this morning. It's such a relief to actually feel excited about going back to the studio!*