



OCTOBER 21, 2020

## Meet Betsy Eby



Today we'd like to introduce you to Betsy Eby.

**Betsy, can you briefly walk us through your story – how you started and how you got to where you are today.** I am an artist. As a painter, I paint nature based abstract paintings that correlate the movement and rhythms of nature and the movement and rhythms of music. My work is represented with galleries, dealers and advisors throughout the United States, Paris and London. As a musician, my classical piano training started at age five. I play every day as a way to tap the sublime that informs my paintings. As a filmmaker, I've worked on a handful of films in the capacity of producer, executive producer, musician and music director.

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I was born in Seaside, Oregon where the wild Pacific Ocean and grandeur of nature informed me. I earned a BA in Art history at University of Oregon then lived my adult life in Seattle until relocating to the South to open an art center seven years ago. I came to the South by way of my husband, artist Bo Bartlett, whom I met in 2004, who was born in Columbus. The cultural norm of my home place, the Great Northwest, is one of rugged individualism and reverence for nature. My ancestors were individualists, entrepreneurs and prospectors. These are the qualities in my DNA that shaped me early on. I thought nothing of bucking cultural norms or status quo in the pursuit of dreams.

My parents were loving and stable. They still are. That has played a big part in my freedom to dream, invent and pursue. Piano playing was all I wanted to do as a kid. Painting was secondary until a bit later. It wasn't until later in my painting development, when painting took first position, that I understood the two were interlinked.

I came to painting as an art history graduate through night classes and endless hours in an unheated basement studio, experimenting with materials and process. During this time, I was reading a lot of humanistic psychology: that of Jung, Nietzsche, Frankl, and alike. I wanted to paint beyond the secular human condition, paint a place within an ascendant realm. Later I came to define that realm as the place where music lives. I started with watercolors, then acrylics, then oil, until I came upon a book of ancient materials and began experimenting with natural resins and wax. That long learning curve resulted in mastering the medium and process of encaustic, for which my work is known today. I took every odd job I could just to pay rent. I had absolutely no money. Seattle was the grunge scene. Curt Cobain lived down the street. Starbucks was a specialty shop in the market and people were moving to town from all over to work for a little start up called Microsoft. I became friends with many of them. One of them bought my paintings. His house was published in a magazine and my paintings were front and center. Then Nordstrom collected my paintings for stores across the country, Boeing collected for their headquarters, then I got a gallery, then a better gallery, then a New York gallery. My career started because I happened to be living in a burgeoning place within a zeitgeist. While I talk of career, I want to



be clear about something. Career is a separate thing from art making. The art must always come first. You have to be married to it, love it, feed it, protect your time for it, protect your soul for it and live and breathe it like it's your personal religion.

I paint every day. Today, I have two studios. My South studio, in Columbus, GA, is a 3,000sq. space in a converted cotton mill. My North studio in Maine, overlooks the Atlantic Ocean with nothing between me and Portugal. The environment is wild and secluded. Our Maine home is my soul's home.

**We're always bombarded by how great it is to pursue your passion, etc – but we've spoken with enough people to know that it's not always easy. Overall, would you say things have been easy for you?**

I came from a stable home but nothing was handed to me. I started working when I was twelve years old and I've never stopped. I've worked incredibly hard while keeping my eye on the horizon. I didn't proclaim a long-term goal early on, except that I wanted to be good at something nobody else could do.

There have been challenges and tragedies. My first challenge was, at age 21, a serious car accident that curtailed my modeling aspirations, triggered illness and landed me in bed on and off for a year. The late neurologist Oliver Sacks theorized that sudden blows to the head can rewire your brain and change the course of your life and intensity of interests. I think that's what happened to me, because after the accident, all I wanted to do was paint. I double downed on my commitment to music and devoured books about psychology, musicians and painters. I had an existential awakening.

The dissolution of my first marriage was hard. But I knew intrinsically that the fullness of my growth rested upon leaving a situation that wasn't necessarily bad, just not one that plumbed me to my greatest depths. The death of my stepson was very hard too, and managing a health situation within the family has been challenging.

I will say the greatest ongoing challenge is patriarchy. I didn't know it existed until I moved to a small town in the south. One can bring a lifetime of expertise



and experience to the table, but it can be snubbed to nothing if that table is full of white men protecting their power. The secrecy, the silence, the disrespect, it's all really hard. So, I rely on professional relationships outside of where I live. My work is supported by people in different places. My husband is evolved and amazing, so that helps. Change comes slowly and incrementally but it's an honor to be a part of the evolution of the New South where young people, women, people of color shape the future.

**We'd love to hear more about your work.**

I am known known for my paintings.

**What were you like growing up?**

I was a shy kid who liked the company of nature and critters over the company of crowds. I felt part of a broader language, that of the natural world, the cosmos, bugs, and oceans.

In terms of career and life's purpose, when I was a teenager, I thought everyone had it figured out long before I did. I see now that therein lies the difference between defining one's life early on verses letting it unfold through a single pointed long-term vision. I'm not a believer in predeterminism.

As a child of the Great Northwest's frontier spirit, I've always questioned authority.