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Adrift Bruce Baughman

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Portions of the following are taken from an interview with the artist on January 28, 2005

Bruce Baughman cannot remember a time when he did not draw or paint. Although his mother drew some, he was more influenced by an aunt who was a painter in California and who gave him a set of oil paints when he was very young. Baughman was born in Muskegon, Michigan and grew up in that mid-western state. As is so often the case with artists, his other love is music and he left Michigan to attend Indiana University as a vocal major. Indeed, much of his adult life has been spent as a professional opera singer. Living in Europe from 1975 to 1985, he sang opera and traveled in India, Asia, and the Middle East. After returning to the States, Baughman opened a gallery in Saugatuck, MI, and in 2001 opened a second gallery in Tubac, AZ. He now splits his time between his old home and his new one, spending April to November in Michigan and the rest of the year in Arizona.

His ten years in Europe helped him sort out who he was and what he wanted to do. He was told that art is dead, but if you are going to be an artist do not copy another person's struggle to get something on canvas. So he began searching for something different. He found it in what he refers to as reverse painting. The French call this way of painting *eglotmise*. This centuries-old technique—which has largely been abandoned in Europe—began with painting on glass but Baughman uses Lucite and gets the same effect. He likens it to looking at something under glass which modern Americans do every day when they look at their computer monitors or television screens.

People usually have a strong response to this type of painting, but it is extremely difficult to do. “To paint a clear picture that will look right from the front, Baughman paints on the backside of the plastic and has to start with the fine, accent lines first then lay in the background at the very end. When looking at the back of a finished painting, it looks like someone has dropped gobs of paint randomly around a square, but the front is a magical image of finely detailed flowers, trees or women.” (Glazer, 2001). He paints florals, landscapes, seascapes, and art nouveau women using the reverse technique. Baughman says that when he paints a woman, he has to start with the eyelashes. He also paints in the traditional way on the surface and even sometimes blends the two. Lately he has moved into abstracts. He knew he would have to start abstracting but came

late to what he considers a more valid, meaningful way of painting. He feels that very large-scale abstract paintings are worth doing and represent our culture. He says that what he puts on canvas comes from growing up in America at this time and that his own journey comes out in this work.

Baughman has always relied on the creative side of his brain to get him through life. He finds it difficult to talk about his art as he says “it is not connected to the part of my brain where the words are.” He just works at a painting until he gets what he is after, but it is not connected to vocabulary. Baughman reports that quite a few psychologists buy his work and he thinks they may be drawn to it because he paints both backward and forward. He comfortably switches back and forth in his artistic work but asserts that when he has to switch into a business mode he is not as comfortable. He found that running a gallery takes a toll on his very being. So he leaves the running of his galleries to others and concentrates on painting.

Adrift, the painting on the cover was done totally on the surface. The sky in *Adrift* seems to glow with a light of its own. It reveals an attention to detail so important to the artist. Having grown up on Lake Michigan, Baughman is familiar with water. He says that he paints seascapes to relax. He finds his surface-painted seascapes peaceful with no land, people or boats—just the horizon, clouds and water. Indeed, *Adrift* has almost a zen feeling of peace. According to Baughman, painting on the canvas surface allows more blending, which contributes to the peaceful feeling. Baughman also paints seascapes in reverse but says they are more dramatic and intense, with strong colors, lines, and contrast. However, he keeps returning to seascapes painted entirely on the front because they are so satisfying to him.

Reference:

Glazer, F. (2001, February 15). Painter creates his own style. *The Commercial Record*, Saugatuck, Michigan.. p. 5.

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