

# Thomas Erben Gallery



## Conversation – 03/19/14

*Donna* – Didn't you use to be a figurative painter?

*Dona* – Yes, I tried that, but I wasn't very good at it. My attention would wander. I would start looking at the wood handle of the brush or at the way the bristles of the brush mooshed the pile of oil paint. I would forget what I was trying to represent. I would forget what representation was. I would start to doubt the meaning of the words that stood in the stead of reality. I would chew the brush handle to remind myself of what reality was, which wasn't very good because sometimes I used lead white or silver white or Cremnitz white or Flake White.

*Donna* – When you were a representational painter, did you always paint people?

*Dona* – No, I tried to paint trees too, but then I would notice the wood handle of my brush, and I would be confused as to what the tree I was looking at was, let alone the tree on my canvas! I felt something was off. Sometimes I would notice my own hand trying to paint another person's hand, and I would get very confused. I don't know what representation is, and I'm very surprised that people take it so seriously, with photography and all. It's alarming to me that people look at pictures of cornfields as if the pictures are informative, when the pictures have nothing in common with cornfields at all!

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*Donna* – You have a point there. So now you're an abstract painter?

*Dona* – I don't know if I would go so far as to say that. I know even less about abstract painting than I do representational painting. Some painters do almost the same painting over and over again, with their name printed, either under the painting, or along side of it, and the painting becomes a surrogate for the person of the artist. In fact, people often point to an abstract painting and say the name of the person who painted it. "That is a 'so and so,' they will say. It's like a very simple game. The viewers don't actually need to look at the painting. They just need to identify the artist. What's abstract about that?

*Donna* - If you are not a representational painter and you are not an abstract painter, what are you?

*Dona* – I am a person who works with canvas and cardboard buckets and rubber hoses and fluid acrylics and cheesecloth and string and acrylic gel mediums. I also work with the structures of stretchers that I have had for years. The old wood takes the paint in a different way than new wood. I also work with time. The canvas of *Top*, was soaked with paint ten years ago. The green background color was the back of a maroon and blue painting that was never finished. I found the back of that painting in the back of my mind.

*Donna* - How do you decide the images?

*Dona* – Certain colors suggest certain images. For instance, the character on the back of *Splash*, is a direct response to the green splash on the front. If I'm working with an assistant, as I do when I make the string paintings, the images tend to be more social, because I'm not alone when I make them.

*Donna* – What's with the two-sided thing?

*Dona* – That's the process I've found that works best for me, soaking paint through the canvas, using fluid acrylics and acrylic flow release. The painting on the back comes into existence without my seeing it. The backs are received paintings, like the back of *March Hare* is a completely received image, and the front is worked like crazy. I work with the painting gods. We drink together.