



# A River + flaws

# er Beneath

ELIZABETH LEVENTHAL

By Nicole Borgenicht

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A representational shape resurfaces on the canvases of Elizabeth Leventhal to connect nature with the essence of paint. It is as if she paints layered bursts of energy that act as a universal symbiosis of experience. We see, we feel, we have many of our senses realized through art that takes us into search modes. In her paintings we seek answers as to why a shape appears as a reflection, or does it exist on its own in a semi-abstract watery current that runs along, above and beneath all that we see and perhaps feel? Elizabeth Leventhal paints organic shapes that seem to have fallen into a sea of emotion

where shapes so perfectly outline or drift into volumetric configurations. In Leventhal's art, we see her artistic technique of opaque and airy, thick and tenuous organic shapes and lines of energy running like our minds through life's river of opposite tones.

The seasons play a large part in the subject matter and mood of Leventhal's paintings. From Moore College of Art in Pennsylvania and the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston to her present home in Georgia, Elizabeth Leventhal's work is now influenced by the visual weather stories of Atlanta. "Thunderstorms were more dramatic in the summer. Clouds hung low. Huge plumes of cloud columns would form because of the heat and humidity. My surroundings changed and I really paid attention to new elements of nature- line shapes and seasons changing. This started showing up in my work in a representational way in the early

2000's and then purely abstract as I grew as an artist." Leventhal says.

At once capturing the sense of nature with movement and light, she creates an artistic metaphor that takes us through the moment yearning for answers while enjoying the journey. Elizabeth Leventhal compares Turner to Rothko, and we see both in her work. A blending of nature's journey with a splash of the here and now, to sense the unknown is that which art is all about. One essential ingredient of viewing good art is our visceral response, one that is not superseded by representational or abstract imagery nor technical analysis. Leventhal's art generates a universal tone whereby the artist and viewer migration intersects.

The study and use of light has always been an integral part of the artist's work. Uniquely acquired through multiple layers or via composition and imagery, Leventhal designs a new study of light and dark. She says, "I am constantly aware of creating light within the work through color pairings and interactions. I pour colors onto the canvas and watch what happens. I intuitively edit and add. I don't know that it is different from the Impressionist mindset. I am projecting an emotional response to my surroundings in a moment captured not a pastoral landscape; but the glow of the light or the movement of the forms in the painting are similar. The difference may be the application. It's not the vigorous brushstroke but the calm, soothing application in a more organic way. I think of Turner, a hero of mine. He kind of bridged the gap to the 20th Century Modernists. He has a kindred spirit to Rothko."

In analyzing the painterly techniques there is freedom integral in the artist

layout and suitability of mediums. Leventhal describes her method: "I use ink, gouache and watercolor to begin a piece. These can be manipulated and moved around as I form the idea of the painting. I also use graphite and oil pastel as drawn elements. I love to use mark making in the painting as a resting place for the eye. And to add diversity from the very organic shapes used in my work. Translucency is created in many ways and is usually the result of great experimentation. Water and mediums are added to the materials to 'see what happens.' I then use hard edges in oil paint to edit finding the gems in the underlying layers."

Within these layers of paint, shapes are formed that move through a river of intension and fantasy. Locked beneath the conscious just as when we release our imaginative dreams that carry with them stories of our minds. And so the artist allows such freedom, while skillfully guiding the path of shapes and space. "Shapes are anchors that our minds stop to reflect on. We identify them either as ambiguous or a form we recognize. I use subtle or intense color interaction to create the depth or space in the piece. There is a lot of discovery as I paint. I am intuitively responding to shapes made as happy accidents or intentionally as final touches. I heighten certain shapes by making them the focal point or hide them beneath other layers to create the sense of a pool of water or an image seen within a wave crashing." Says Elizabeth Leventhal.

Once on a successful journey, an artist then evolves into a new series based on a decisive expansion of technique: such as a spontaneous mark that pulls together another dimension of the complete painting. Leventhal looks to

the future, "I am focusing more and more on mark making in the work. Currently I am looking at a lot of my old favorites Terry Winters, Cy Twombly, Joan Mitchell, Georg Baselitz. and more recent artists Julie Mehretu and Rocio Rodriguez. Also I am continuing to experiment with materials and use them in new ways. Creating layers to create depth in surprising ways has always been a love of mine and will continue."

Mixed media adroitness is always a stalwart method in the art world. The symmetrical theme to Leventhal's series of water and work is merely interrupted by new textures and attachments that confront the viewer with an increase of objectivity noting objects not only images while following the medium transitions still in a unique entity of movement. "Mixed media to me allows for more creative freedom. It is a way to give the materials more of a voice. I direct, they sing. My mixed media paintings use a lot of different mediums acrylic and oil to allow the paint to flow. Mediums are added to get the desired consistency to allow application that takes my heavy hand out of it. I chime in to gather the idea together."

From an art historical perspective, Leventhal has the flexibility of the Expressionists. She paints organic shapes reminiscent of nature, yet with painterly fluidity. Structure therefore is both learned and inherent, realized and tapered to a specific dimension. She dismisses over focusing on what is learned only because she knows it so well, and thus abandons inhibition to create what looks like an organic river of paint.

On categorizing her own work, Leventhal says, "Classifying styles these days are tricky. The styles that

I am inspired by are the Abstract Expressionists and the German Expressionists. I believe this is evident in my work over the years. The manner in which I apply the paint starts organically. The shapes I choose are very organic. The theme of my work would be seasons changing or rather watching what changes around me in my environment and seeing that come through the work. I have a pull toward certain palettes at certain times of the year. Shapes appear as leaves start falling. What I feel when I paint is the notion to really look and see what is unfolding in front of me on the canvas and guide it toward a moment of wonder.”

In tandem with her freedom of expression, Leventhal’s art education continues to play an important role. With recognition to a special teacher, she says, “My greatest influence was my painting professor Rob Moore at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. Through his teaching I developed my color language. His wisdom about Joseph Albers and color interaction still rings in my head to this day. I learned how to be a painter from him. It is due to him that I am on the path that I am on today. I am following that same excitement of seeing something happen with color that I could not predict or decide before it hit the canvas today.”

A few galleries Elizabeth Leventhal’s paintings currently hang include Jules Place, Boston MA, Pryor Fine Art, Atlanta GA, and her permanent installations comprise Archbold Hospital “Art as Healing” Thomasville, GA., Yale Hospital New Haven, CT., Cosmopolitan Resort Las Vegas, NV.

[www.lizbarber.com](http://www.lizbarber.com)



(top) **Dive 3**  
mixed media on canvas, 24 x 24in.

(above left) **Spring Rain**  
mixed media on canvas, 48 x 60in.

(above right) **Summer Rain**  
mixed media on canvas, 48 x 60in.