

EK Interview: Emily Eveleth

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By [the blind architect](#)



Circle, 2008, oil on canvas, 72 x 155 in.

How long have you been painting? How did you get into painting?

Apparently I was a frustrated painter without knowing it. I had a great teacher in high school who was a working artist, and a wonderful printmaker. He taught me silkscreen printing and I began doing that very seriously. But I was always bumping up against the medium and he told me I was a frustrated painter. So I started studying painting as soon as I got the chance and that was in college.



Unintended Consequences, 2008, oil on canvas, 68 x 60 in.

Besides oil, what media have you experimented with (if any)? And what made you decide ultimately on oil?

Let's see, in terms of media other than oil I've worked in silkscreen, ink drawing, pastels and gouache. I've also tried a several other print media. Other than oil I've worked most extensively with model airplane enamels, and with a sort of paint I make with graphite and oil that I use on mylar. Oil is my main choice because of the freedom and flexibility it offers both in painting techniques and in the looks you can get with it.

Beside oil, the one I keep returning to is mylar. I first used pencil on mylar when making cyanotypes and immediately loved how the graphite took to it. As I developed a technique of graphite mixed with oil I

realized what makes mylar unique is how the oil reacts to the surface. The oil/graphite mix is so slippery, so fluid on the mylar that the process becomes a cross between painting and drawing.

Tell us about an unexpected lesson you have learned throughout your career.

A hard lesson to learn is to find the balance between planning a painting enough to ensure a good start and a good finish, while still leaving enough scope to be open to making changes as the painting progresses.



Straight Cut, 2008, oil on canvas, 26 x 18 in.

Your paintings have been described as very anthropomorphic, was that always an aim of yours or was it something that evolved throughout your career?

In one way, it is something that has evolved, at least in the sense that it was something that I became aware I was doing after I'd been doing it. But I've always tried to make paintings that are something more or something that step outside of the apparent subject or genre.



Regency, 2012, oil on canvas, 73 x 71 in.

A large focus of your work seems to be either food or the implements through which we eat food, our hands although many of the pieces displaying hands portray them in a non-gustatory manner. Is this an intentional focus? Do you think hands are fetishized in a manner similar to food, if not for the same reasons?

I don't see hands strictly or immediately as implements for eating, so in that way, it's a bit of a coincidence. But both hands and doughnuts can be very evocative and can take on personas or some similar quality of expression.

With the newest hand paintings I was interested in both the meaning of the object held (the Magic 8-ball, the globe bank) and who's holding it. The Magic 8-ball is such a great object, on the one hand it's a simple game but it remains fraught with the wonderful apprehension that its answer just might be true.



Eight Ball no. 4, 2010, oil on mylar, 8.5 x 14.5 in.

Do you think that a donut can be as emotive as a human face? When you are constructing a painting what features of the donut do you look to accentuate that might be parallels to those of the face?

I don't think along those lines. Even when the forms are very evocative of bodies I'm still after a certain ambiguity, an openness to multiple readings. As far as the construction goes, in creating the emotional content you're always juggling everything at once, working with all the elements; spatial

relationships, lighting, color, paint surface, but the first thing I try to establish is a specific point of view.

What were you feeling when you came up with idea for “Holding”? Where were you?

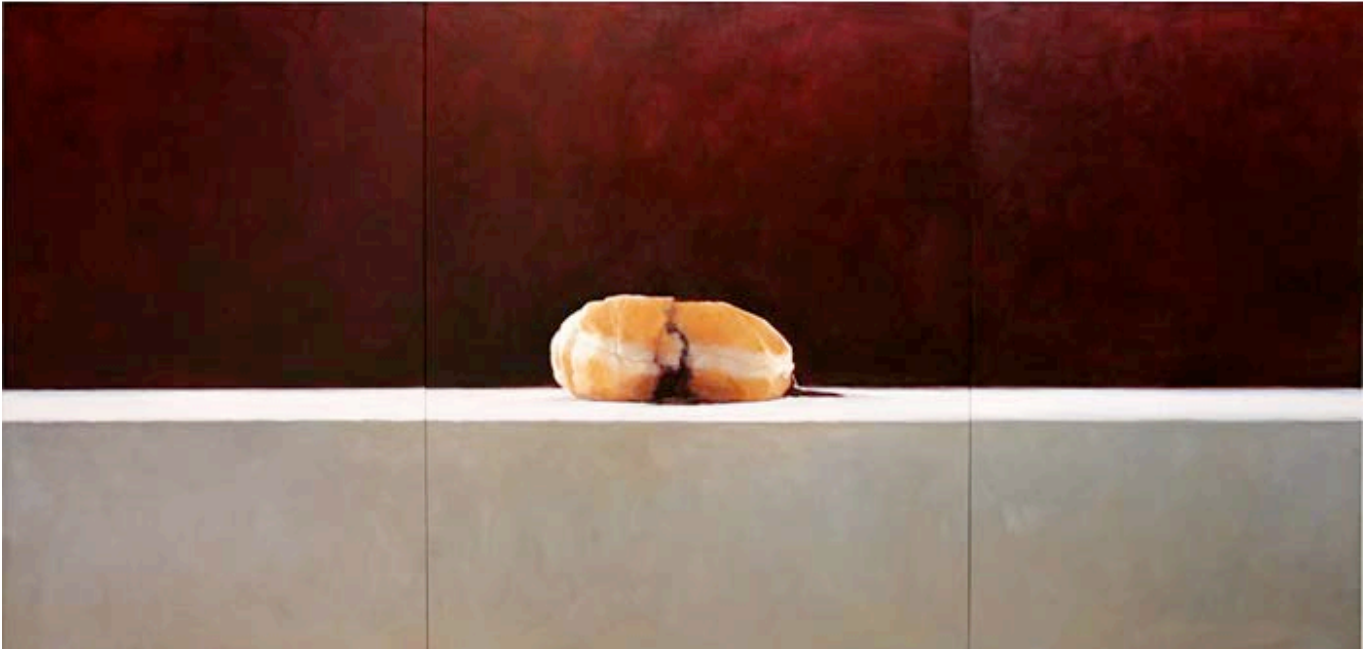
With “Holding” I was thinking about three things. The first was depicting a history. I was looking at how formal portraits, like the photos of Yousuf Karsh from the 40’s, are made and how they capture a sense that the sitter is a person with a history, that the photo is more than momentary snapshot. At the same time I was reading a comparison of David’s “The Death of Marat” and Goya’s “The Third of May”. There are so many ways to talk about these two, from socio-political issues to painting handling, but I was most taken by the difference in feel; one portrayal is perfected and still, very removed from the act, and the other is raw and visceral and active. With Holding I was after that first kind of stillness, a posed quality. I was also looking at the profound difference in how the viewer enters the two images. In David’s you are cut off, held at a remove by the vertical front of the tub and in the Goya the ground comes right down to you, you are swept into the scene. In contrast to its stillness I wanted Holding to have that kind of visual entry, where you move right into the scene.



Holding, 2008, oil on canvas, 90 x 84 in.

Can you tell us about “Circle”? What it means to you when you look at it, what you hope viewers to take away?

The first thing I hope viewers have is a sense of melancholy, that the heightened awareness of empty space evokes a feeling of loneliness. The response that hit the nail on the head for me was someone who noted how the austerity and restraint in the painting, the kind one finds in early 16th century Spanish paintings, play against a subject more often associated with impulse and excess.



Circle, 2008, oil on canvas, 72 x 155 in.

In many of your paintings there are two donuts, and more often than not one appears to be in better condition than the other, whether ruptured or leaking heavily, do you see this as a parallel to the relationships of humans? Do you believe that many relationships tax or cost (emotionally, physically, fiscally) one party more than the other?

I'm not trying to generalize about human relationships. It's more that relationships that are placid, relationships where both parties are equals, relationships where nothing has happened or will happen are not very interesting subjects. "Hamlet, the Happy Prince", would have been a pretty dull play.

How has your work changed since you first began in terms of content?

The content of my work purely in terms of subject has changed, or maybe I should say, ranged, fairly broadly, from rural landscapes to urban landscape, still life, both of one or a few objects to elaborate setups, and figurative work. About the only thing I haven't done in the representational realm is portraiture. That being said, the content conceptually has pretty much always been to make work that is not about the subject, at least not about the obvious, first take idea of what the subject seems to

be. It might be the contrarian in me, but I've always loved making paintings that in a sense deny what they seem to be.



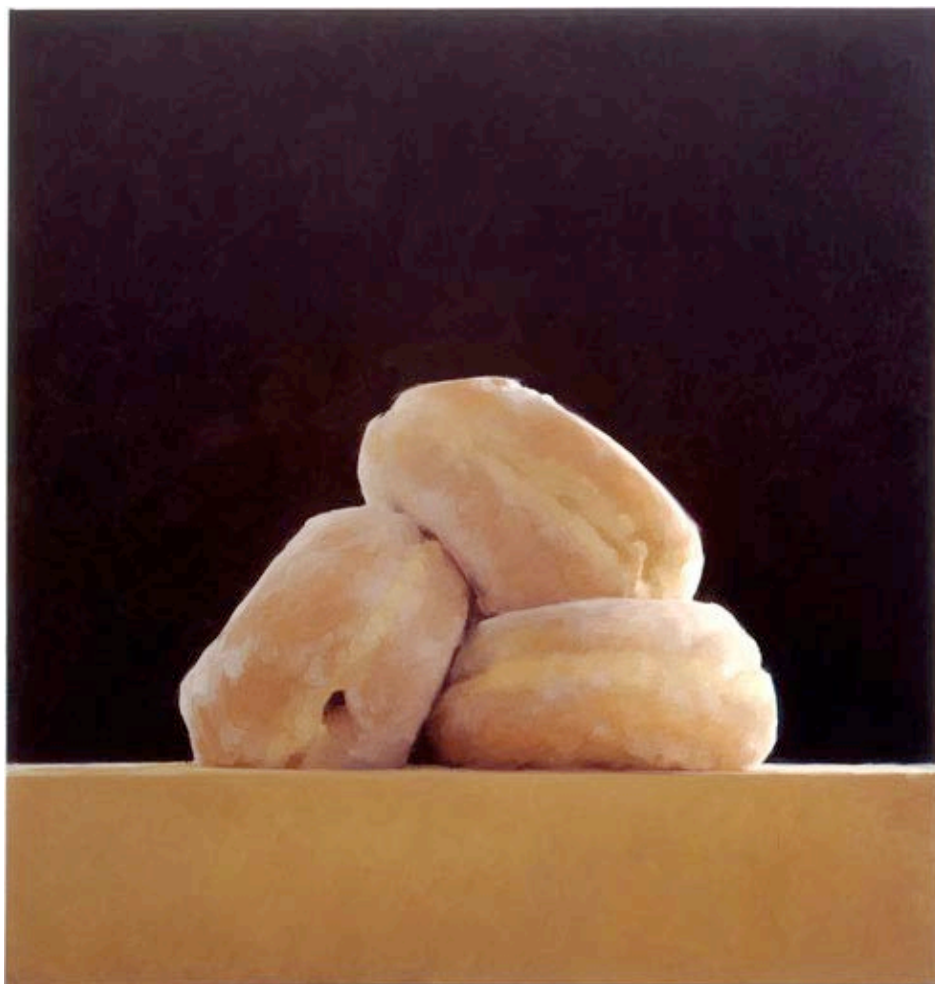
Snake Eyes, 2009-11, oil on mylar, 12 x 9.5 in.

How has your style, approach and the physical action of you making a painting changed?

My style has definitely changed. I was first going to say my brushwork and paint handling have gotten looser over time, but they've gotten both looser and tighter, that is, more varied. I try to use whatever handling a particular painting or passage needs. And my approach to the act of painting has changed too, moving toward the idea of doing more with less. Things haven't changed, though, on the physical side. I've always been a very active painter and am constantly stepping back as I paint to look at the work from a distance, the further the better.

Which, of all your pieces is your favorite? If you have one, what have you done with it, sold it? Kept it? Given it away?

One I keep coming back to is "Shelter". It's an early one. I'd just moved into a new studio with high ceilings and it was the first time I could start making taller paintings and working with that kind of spatial volume. It's in a private collection but they are great about lending. It was recently in a show that had ten years of work and it was fantastic to see it in that context. I'm not sure what still compels me about it, the classical structure? The feeling of intimacy against the rigor of the presentation? Hard to pin it down.



Shelter, 1998, oil on canvas, 80 x 76 in.

What are you working on currently?

Right now I'm working on large show for New York. It's a doughnut show but the work is taking a bit of different turn, with a more tightly focused theme than I've worked with in the past. Since I don't want to setting up pre-conceptions in people's minds I won't say more than that now.

Is there was one project that would maybe take more commitment than you're cabale of investing at the moment but in another dimension you've run away from your life and pursued? Tell us about it.

Something I'd love to do, and if the skills and time and resources landed on my doorstep I'd do it, would be film.

<http://www.emptykingdom.com/main/featured/interview-emily-eveleth/>