

RICKY DARELL BARTON

Robot Paintings

Robot Paintings are created in the abstract by using a set color scheme and vocabulary. Using foreground and background painting allows color to become the principal character in the painting process, which is the conversation I wanted to have about painting when I began the series, and it thus materialized as my most recent contribution to art. I began by using certain colors, which infused energy into the canvas, and that energy was further enhanced when I spatially added letters and shapes. The result was the “robotic” emergence of figurative shapes. This greatly excited me, and I immediately wondered how many works I could create this way, whether there could be a consistent voice, what effects would result from using different color choices, and whether I would enjoy painting such works over and over again. That's my exploratory conversation now.

The year 1890 was a very modernist point in time in the world of art. The great modern colorist Van Gogh dies; French impressionist Renoir paints a modern masterpiece; young modern artists, such as Kandinsky and Picasso, arrive in Paris; and a new art form emerges based on a new technology, called Graphic Arts, one great example of which was a series of Valentine greetings that were printed in two colors, blue and red. The resulting energy of combining blue and red made Valentines cards highly popular and enduring, and the new use of multicolor printing became a profitable commercial art form. I began to use blue and red to create that same energy, and then found that other color combinations also generate visual “vibration,” just as many artists in the Color School recognized in their time. Color also interests me, however, when it is monochromatic; dominating tones can evoke a variety of feelings, so this became another approach to create my paintings such that in different ways the use of color generates both energy and feeling.

I also use text as a component in my work. I grew up during the 1980s when graffiti first became ubiquitous and expressionist artists were using it in their paintings. I thus wanted my work to be primitive like graffiti and I also wanted a “tag” to reflect that. It occurred to me that the first thing one hears as a baby is likely the motherly command, “Eat!” You have to eat to survive. It is also an iconic word in past artwork. I therefore chose “EAT,” which is also an acronym for “Everlasting Art Treasure,” as my tag, since it is both primitive and transcendent. I also use letters from my name, several geometric shapes, such as an X, a star, arrows, and dots, as components as well. I then “lock” the painting by using black lines and shards. The “googly” eyes are dedicated to Kandinsky, who first used them in paintings in 1918.

By weaving these elements together as I feel them, and thus through luck and chance, images actually create themselves in the painting. This is why I call them Robot Paintings; even robotic faces, along with many other things, appear long after the works are completed. My interest thus lies in immersing myself in the process of making each work, which distracts me from looking at the image until it is ready to be “discovered.” Finding images within images within my works seems endless because Robot Paintings, in effect, keep making themselves.