

Christopher Schade - Artist Statement

For the past five years I have been using the form of islands to explore a fusion of figure and landscape. My previous studio paintings had always been figurative as a way to convey drama and psychology. Outside the studio, I had been painting plein air landscapes investigating light, space and time. The island, as a seemingly isolated geological form, has figurative elements while allowing for a study of landscape.

As my exploration of this fused form of landscape and figure has progressed, I have moved from spaces with one consistent horizon line, local color and semi-realistic rendering of rock formations (albeit gravity defying) to spaces of multiple horizon lines, tilted and curved horizon lines, abstract color and disjointed cast shadows. The manipulation of traditional pictorial and perceptual visual anchors such as horizon lines and cast shadows opens up a space where I can find the unknown. The unknown provides a level of surprise in the paintings that is akin to my experience of the unexpected in life. It is exciting when my painting can have a visceral effect such as making me feel as if I'm losing my balance. Formally, destabilization also forces me to find new and unexpected ways of creating order.

The subjects within the islands have multiplied in complexity from studies of rock, water and sky to suns, moons, stars, planets, stairs, arches, animal limbs (such as hooves or paws), skulls, and heads. The structure holding all these different forms together are the transitions. Some shifts in space, color or scale are abrupt; but, mostly, I am interested in visual dissolves that take you from one space to another seamlessly. This feels like a close visual analog to how I mentally reorder daily experience through memory and imagination. The transitional is also important because it is in mid-mutation that forms seem richest in possible meaning, potential and visual discovery. Transitional periods from other artists careers have become very interesting to me for this same reason- Braque's first cubist landscapes of L'Estaque in 1908, Mondrian's abstraction of trees in 1911 and DeKooning's landscapes from 1975-80. This interest in a fluid fusing also has a personal resonance as I grew up in a bi-cultural household where everything was hybridized- language, customs, even the landscape as we would travel from Texas to Chile every year.

Making these island paintings has also led me to think about time: human scale time, geological time in how islands are formed through tectonic shifts, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, and even a celestial sense of time where planets and stars form and then are destroyed.

In a formal sense, the islands have become vehicles for my fascination with different visual languages of representation. My longstanding interest in varied ways of painting including the gestural and the hard-edged, the linear and the tonal, symbolic and the perceptual. Initially, each of these visual languages had its own strain in my work and the recent project has been finding the form that can hold all these ways of painting together. This seems to be the way that I can convey, through painting, my own sense of the complexity and awe inspiring wonder of the world.