

Leslie Parke Artist Statement



When I was two, my father built a pair of wooden sailboats – Blue Jays #230 and #231- smack in the middle of the living room of our suburban New York home. What better proof could I have had that my parents valued experience over propriety?

The boats served as my playpens. Working alongside my father I filled screw holes with putty and helped smooth the wood using both dry and wet sandpaper. It was also the first time I experienced paint in all its forms—from deck paint with sand added to prevent slipping, to two part epoxy paint for the sides of the boat, and copper paint for the bottom. Long before Ken Noland made his striped paintings, my father painted waterlines using masking tape.

The way my father painted his boats has more to do with how I paint than anything I learned at school. His passion for boats—and the materials that go into

making them—gave me an early and intimate understanding of, and respect for, materials and their uses.

The look, the smell, the feel of paint are all sensations I grew up with.

For years, I used my photographs as an aid to my paintings, but as my subject matter became more and more abstract, so did the photos and one day the Director of the Bennington Museum and, also, to one of my dealers both asked, “Why aren’t you printing *these* as art?” “Because I am a painter!” I said. But they asked me again and again, which prompted me to include photographs in my body of work. It makes sense: for years people have told me that my paintings look like photographs. Now they tell me my photographs look like paintings. I think of my photographs as paintings and want them to be read that way, at least initially. The photographs have become a shape-shifting exercise for me. They question reality and perception.

Once I started printing my large abstract-looking photographs, the paintings became untethered from the photographs. I let the paintings be about light and paint. They still, on occasion, wrestle with questions of illusion, and they still frequently have a reference in nature.

Yes, there *are* themes that have recurred throughout the course of my career: issues about light, illusion, a sense of time and a specific place. But most important now is to make paintings that serve as portals through which viewers can enter and connect to that which in the universe supports us.

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