

MICHAEL BREAKIRON
ARTIST STATEMENT

My paintings are a synthesis of transitory experiences, focusing on moments in nature viewed through vertical landscape of the Asian perspective carrying over elements of Ukioe, (floating world imagery), Wabbi-Sabie, (Perfection in the unbalance), then mixed with West European, Dutch, and Flemish painting techniques such as trumpelei, grassilie, and scrafitto, combined with a dash of romantic notions of the sublime. Notion of path, process, place, craft, technique, and direction are primary objectives in my recent work, as well as formal issues regarding balance, repetition, flow, pace, and other basic gestalt design principals. The work is process oriented and begins at the beginning of my aesthetic experience, or rather when something catches my eye while I am outdoors with my dog Kya and a cheap twenty dollar Advantax camera that I use for its panoramic feature. I try to get out much as possible to the woods to clear my mind and perhaps find a new perspective with clarity of mind. Most of the images I take are void of human subjects and show little or no interaction with man. I hope this will help my work maintain a sense of timelessness that could be representative of the past, present, or future, much like transitions and scene changes in movies, that can act as good buffers between scenes and or a palette cleanser wiping the mind clear of what happened and making room for what is next without disrupt-ing the flow, pace, or tempo of the film. This aspect of films also reminds us that this is not happening real time, the transition puts us in perspective by reminding us that we are not watching linear time or objective reality, because reality has no intermissions, rather we are following a subjective time line or non-ordinary reality such as we experience in dreams and memories. The latter is important, and there are other clues throughout the series that act as breaks in time that mark my works progression such as changes in style, medium, surfaces, and seasons. These subtleties help to illustrate the evolution of my learning processes, and highlight the changes that have taken place throughout the evolution of my work.

In the winter I take walks with my dog and we play Frisbee or go snow shoeing up in Northern Michigan, in the spring sometimes I go steelhead fishing with some friends up at the Manistee River. All the free time I can spare in the spring and into the mid-summer is usually spent in search of new rivers to paddle in my kayak. I go with two or three friends on weekend trips up north to rivers like the Sturgeon, the White, Pine, Ausable, Carp, Manistee, and during the week I take day trips to the Rouge, or the Muskegon. I thoroughly enjoy these times in my boat on a stream; a path set apart from all others free from the fast pace life of the city streets and neon lights. Later In the summer when the water is low and slow on the rivers I head further north for longer weekend trips in the Upper Peninsula where the rivers get more rugged and more remote but run later in the summer. To fill in the gaps between weekends I go mountain biking on trails with my dog, play Frisbee golf, and go rock climbing in a small town in mid-Michigan called Grand Ledge, that happens to boast the only geographical rock structure in the Lower Peninsula. I consider my time spent outdoors time well spent not only because of its spiritually uplifting capability, and mind clearing effects, but equally because of its untapped reservoir of inspiration. I enjoy nature and am aware that the solace of space has sobering effects on my psyche, and offers moments of profound clarity of mind. Most often in my life and in my work I feel constantly in flux, or transition and have trouble focusing on tasks, direction or organizing my time and I believe my paintings act as physical outlets where I work out my confusions, by exposing my problem areas that help me realize my position and place. In a way painting for me is not merely spiritual homage to spaces within nature, but also importantly acts as a therapeutic device that brings clarity and foresight to my daily life, by highlighting my faults helping to solidify my understanding of foundation, location and direction of mental as well as physical gestalt in the world.

These paintings with the exception of the four wood panels are stretched over a nontraditional frame or 'stretcher' made in the fashion of shoji panels that would be made by Japanese or Korean wood workers. These would have traditionally been covered with rice paper to be used as sliding doors, windows, and dividing walls in the Asian home or dwellings. Here I think it's important to realize the combining of traditions with ideals, and how integral this role is in the culmination of my work, and how combining orients has helped me to visual-ize the specific placement of my work within the social stratosphere.

My stretchers are made from one by two inch outer supports with a grid work of interior support lattice three quarter inch square, and all paintings in this series are six foot in height and two feet in width. These pieces fit together with mortise and tenon or lap joints, so they fit together in an interlocking fashion that can support canvass without glue or fasteners much like Lincoln logs. Once the canvas is stretched and sized with rabbit skin glue the surfaces become taut and sound as a drum. I began building my stretchers this way because I have always admired Japanese craft in wood work, their love for intimate process that speaks of the impor-tance of path, as well as looking for a new and inventive way to make my stretchers lighter. Because of this new method I have been able to cut my materials in half thus my weight while still maintaining a strong sturdy sup-port. Due to the size and length of my work if I had built my stretchers with one by three inch boards the overall weight would be twice the weight of the stretchers that I built in the Japanese fashion. I have also learned to economize by keeping my costs the same while increasing the quality of my materials, and have less waste as a byproduct. Less than a couple inches of wood and little trimmings of canvas or linen are left when finished. Some would say the only thing I have wasted is my time, but to me time is the only commodity in most lives to be spent cheaply. I would rather like to think my practices closely related to a Zen Buddhists or Taoist path, but also feel the foreboding pressures to create

under the tension of deadlines. I have been working on economiz-ing my time, but realize that I feel pressures from the culture I live in to produce, and they oppose or bind with aspects of the cultures I admire and that in turn inspire a great deal of my work. I find it important for me to bring clarity to this opposition and illustrate that neither side is right or wrong; it is simply a case of perspective "is the glass half empty, or is it half full?", more simply put a difference in the view of orientation and a gap or barrier in communication. I find it interesting that by juxtaposing and combining west and east orients my peer group tends to focus on differences and opposition between them and seem to be opposed to the change in per-spective instead of embracing the distance between in attempts to familiarize oneself with another view. What is more important, our differences and how ideals do not mesh well, or that we have lots to off er one another in the realms of understanding and appreciating differences in perspective? I hope my work illustrates how binary opposition aids in the artistic process of push and pull, and how elements of contrast can combine and congeal to create interestingly new ideals by way of imagery, as well possibly new socially perspectives. Asian markets have been borrowing from and learning from the west for long long time and have prospered from their learn-ing. Much like how the Asian car market seized every opportunity to surpass the American car market simply by offering the consumer buyer products that the American market was unwilling to give. Now the American car market is desperately trying to keep up with its competitors' and stay afloat by offering quick fixes such as super low prices on S.U.V.'s, steam-heated windshield washer fluid, multiple TV. Screens, On-Star tracking sys-tems and many more gimmicky options that are obvious add-on's, most likely what they offer is cheaply made electronic products that will often fail and break soon after the warranty is up, this generates more revenue for American job markets and seems like a reasonable fix or at least enough of one for the American consumer to be enticed to buy (not to be confused with loyalty). Thriving off of impulse buyers tactics the

gambling dumb luck American consumers are only further trapped by their decisions and find out that the cost they save when buying that brand new Silverado is only filled in doubly with the escalating costs of gasoline, and further electronic maintenance. Asian and European markets offer cheaper, smaller products that are easily shippable and burn less gas with higher emissions, and better crash rating standards, some also guarantee their engines for over 200,000 miles. The American market could simply have bypassed this mess by realizing that we were way ahead but that shouldn't mean we are better than our competitors in all aspects, we simply could have saved ourselves lots of trouble by learning from and exploiting the competitor's assets that were their highlights and strong holds on the market. Instead we scuff and scowl saying that "If they can't speak English then they don't belong here" Our problem is avoiding problems, and act as if they are actually our strong points. Simply put binary opposition is a wonderful tool to use in art if understood and should be explored more, politically, socially, economically, and learned from rather than disregarded as non-vital.

I find it more aesthetically effective for me to paint an image if it is fully engrained into my psyche for me this takes time to ponder over an image, immerse myself in the landscape become intimately aware with the space to let the pieces of the puzzle unfold in my mind many times over with as many possible approaches yielding many outcomes. Essentially I paint each painting in my head before I mix paint or touch a brush. Certain amounts of strategy and foresight need to be considered while troubleshooting potential problems that may arise while using an array of mediums, materials, variable dry times, and a wide range of techniques that call on me to reinvent the way I paint often. When I become comfortable with a technique and feel work is becoming regular I find it beneficial to change my approach on paint that add new challenges to my processes, and expand my capabilities to manipulate paint. By making steady changes in my work processes I keep ideas and perspectives from becoming stagnant. I paint in

my head multiple times before I put knife to glass and brush to canvas, by the time I begin to paint I am intimately aware with the place and how I want to capture an essence or specific presence of space through description of textures and chaotic patterns found in nature. I am intimately aware of process and consider it integral in the final stance of my paintings. Taking time to ponder over an image, making use of overlapping planes, and inner weaving techniques require a bit of troubleshooting. Time and in-depth analysis of an image becomes important for me to capture the essence or aura of a specific place.

I want my viewer to engage and be drawn to my images with an internal pull or likeability that comes deep from within one's psyche, perhaps on par with a spiritual emotion or awareness in sync with nature. I have tried too facilitating and encouraging this interaction between the viewer and my work formally by making my paintings dimensions equivalent or roughly to that of an average human, or more appropriately in a one to one ratio with the human figure. This size and format facilitates a one to one interaction with the viewer. A group of viewers can view a landscape painting in the western horizontal format, but when the landscape is turned vertically the field of viewing is narrowed and suddenly calls for a more intimate viewing of one to three persons. The person who stands in direct opposition of the piece at a close distance feels at balance with the world in flux, and the viewers to the left and the right of this primary viewer merely wait to move into the frontal position to fully absorb the aesthetic. When a person or persons view the work they are usually attracted from afar, and when the image catches the viewer's eye it usually beckons them to come closer for a clearer look. Many say because they are curious initially and need a bit more clarification on the image's medium and origin whether it be print or photograph and where is it from, and who made it? I enjoy that the work brings on questions and curiosities from some of my viewers, I guess in a way this facet of the work can help to maintain one's interest. When the viewer is initially engaged it is often

from afar, and they take a closer look because they are unaware and unable to clarify from a distance whether or not the image is a photo, print, lithograph, screen print, or multimedia, but upon taking a closer look their initial curiosity is answered, 'ahh ... it's a painting', but then their mind is posed with more questions, that usually involve technique 'how did he get that effect', and where is this from, is this taken from a photo, and if so where from? All of a sudden the viewer is posed with subtle puzzling questions. I don't sign my work usually and if I do I keep it discrete and camouflaged. In the few paintings I have signed one would never find an autograph unless I pointed it out. I do this because I don't want the image to be cluttered or detracted away from in any way, and I think some people put too much faith in a name, I would rather put faith in space within nature. I want my work to be important or precious because of the image and the textures, craft, and technique that all overlap and intermingle, weaving together to create the image that makes reference to a place, and the textural surface of space and terra. Not because my name or how pretty my signature is; these are unimportant and have little relation to the image other than when in discussing their origin. Origin is integral however to the work since it speaks of space, place, and time, and begins with my journey into the outdoors taking pictures. I would rather my viewer be captured in a moment of subjective reality or nonlinear time progression, a moment to meditate on void of thought and full of atmosphere. Similar to how time functions in dreams, memories, movies, stories and other devices that are used to recall upon specific moments within one's psyche. There are two ways time progresses; linear and nonlinear or as Carlos Castaneda wrote subjective and objective, basically when in so called reality, time can progress only in a linear fashion but movies, memories, dreams, and images are symbolic of a subjective reality or nonlinear time progression where time does not necessarily need to travel in a straight line, and in fact most often does not. Recall upon a memory or a story that you tell over and over; most likely you omit facts that are not important to the story or just

simply to help the story along and embellish specific moments that make your story more entertaining and thus likable, the more you tell the story the more it changes and the better it becomes, you place parts of the story where and when they did not happen, and perhaps inject other parts from other stories to further encapsulate your audience. This is an example of nonlinear time or subjective reality. Our brain even remembers things this way! Try to remember a moment in your past with specific detail and recall the moment in a linear time progression remembering all details not deviating from straight time to pick up lost or momentarily forgotten details. It isn't possible unless you have a photographic memory. In a movie directed by David Lynch called *Lost Highway* there is a scene where Bill Pullman's character is being questioned by the police about their home being recently broken into, The police are asking him to recall upon specific information in his past, and there is a tape that is in question that has apparently been dropped off on their doorstep offering clues to a very confusing puzzle; The police ask the young couple if they own a camcorder and the supposed wife of Pullman's character answers that her husband does not like camcorders because, "he likes to remember things the way he likes to remember them and not necessarily the way that they happened". I find a lot of inspiration in the film genre and the artistic capabilities of directors such as Akira Kurosawa, and David Lynch just to mention a few, mostly due to the way that they manipulate actual time sequences (objective reality, vs. subjective-reality), give their viewers only partial information which adds to the subtle nuances and a feel for the situation being portrayed, and how they chose to unveil pieces of the puzzle where and when the scene can benefit and impact the story with maximum efficiency via its subtle although obtuse placement in context of the overall piece. They are Master story tellers that understand how to keep vital clues from their audience and reveal them only when they are ripe and yield maximum potential, and sometimes info is omitted to add illusion or an air of uncertainty. They realize the importance and power

behind subtle nuances, of pace, tempo, beat, color, composition, contrast, and are capable of juggling them all together in creation of their story's. I like to keep some things from my viewers, something to keep them interested, subtle elements or non-elements rather than are used as trickery to keep the viewer engaged longer than a couple of seconds and hopefully more than once. I am aware that the paintings will be accompanied by a plaque with the normal Riga-ma-role of, 'name, size, title, dimension, and medium' while at a gallery or on display, but once they are purchased and find their way into person's home office or wherever they find themselves they will most likely not be accompanied by this sort of info and can be found out only by observation and questioning. This has the potential to create a bit of a puzzle for persons in the future, and the further they dig, I hope the more their curiosities are rejuvenated as they turn up new clues. Another such element that can only be realized upon investigation and the actual act of picking up a painting or taking it down of the wall to find that it holds yet another secret kept from the average viewer, and that is the issues of craft, and construction of my stretchers. The stretchers are small jewels and feats of craftsmanship within themselves and you wouldn't know it unless you sat in on a critique or actually picked up a painting. Many have made mention of this as if it may be a bad thing or perhaps a waste of time and effort when considering the outcome of the work. In actuality little secrets and subtle complexities can generate and rejuvenate interest in a piece that may seem simple, and then upon further investigation yield more subtle sophistication than initially assumed. My mother's aunt, 'my great aunt', told me once that she didn't enjoy too many newer movies because they gave the viewer everything, through her eyes they were predominantly eye candy, that consumed your imagination with lights, smoke, and special effects, leaving no room for the imagination to fill in the gaps. Lacking subtle sophistication and showing my viewers exactly what it is that I want them to see and pay attention to regardless of their own emotions, and ideals is not how I would like my images to be viewed, nor is it how I

would like to be remembered. Many of my peers would rather label my process as lazy, nonproductive, and consider my techniques just an elaborate ploy to cover up my likeliness to procrastinate, and waste time. Although my extensively labor intensive craft, preparation of surfaces, gathering of imagery, conceptual research, and output or number of finished paintings tell a different side to the story.

The four wood panels are birch hollow core doors cut and trimmed to suit the two by six foot dimensions and then covered in coats of white chalk gesso, after many layers of this have been applied and sanded in between each layer. At this point my images have been selected and a color chosen to be my first ground layer is then applied. Most of this new construction I have just mentioned is new to me, and was chosen as a light and sturdy surface instead of using much heavier Medium density fiberboard (M.D.F.), or birch plywood. I have chose a rigid surface for these four panels because I will experiment with encaustic wax mediums, to better facilitate my use of scrafitto along with pushing the capabilities of depth and contrast through the extensive usage of matt and gloss mediums as well as smooth to rough textures. My goal is to cover these panels in a secondary coat of a much lighter color made with encaustic medium Wax mediums are of the most archival paint mediums that we are presently aware of and require a rigid support to prevent cracking of the wax throughout changing climates and temperatures. From this point I plan to incorporate similar techniques that I have used on my canvass surfaces. The encaustic paint dries almost instantly and requires swift precise short and well place strokes and will most certainly yield different effects from that of my oil paintings. Each time I dip my brush into the paint I have approximately four to eight seconds to place only a few brush strokes measuring one to five inches each. On my topical layers I plan to use less and less wax while adding oilier or "fat-tier" mediums probably the most important formal aspect of my paintings that are equally process related and labor intensive is the techniques I combine to able me to economize my

economy of paint and time. As I mentioned earlier my inspiration begins in nature, with respects to Asian aesthetic in vertical format, and Ukioe floating world imagery' then combining techniques from both west and eastern cultures in attempts to visually bridge the gap between orients. Just as I use combine elements of different cultures aesthetics and explore gaps in opposing philosophical perspectives, I am also mixing, blending, and melding techniques from multiple genres of expression as well as weaving together painting techniques from distant cultures, such as scrafitto, Grassi, Imprematura, wabbi-sabbi, flying white, and ukioe. I begin by preparation of my surfaces, if canvass I apply many thin coats of oil gesso with a palette knife, and the wood panels are covered in a white chalk gesso ground. The coats of chalk gesso dry fast and need to be applied while the gesso is hot and in a quick even coat, The oil gesso takes about sixty four hours to dry thoroughly enough to be sanded, both methods require at least four to six coats. Normally the more coats applied the better, and they both yield different surfaces that can be used effectively to aid in the myriad of techniques I deploy. The chalk gesso needs a rigid surface because of its brittle quality, more porous than the oil gesso and maintains a matt finish. Oil gesso takes much longer to dry, maintains a gloss finish unless sanded, and is most effective on a fabric surface such as canvass or linen. I continue by mixing a dark base tone for each panel, usually just by cutting the color with enough mineral spirits so that it's in thin liquid form and can be applied with a large brush. I apply warm and cool darks depending on the image and take twenty-four hours in front of a heater to dry. Each panel has five to six coats yielding either a warm or cool dark that is matte in appearance and texture and is so dark it approaches black. The first seven or eight paintings a finished that are part of this group are canvass on stretchers made in shoji fashion, each has two or three coats of rabbit skin glue for sizing which ensures that the material be tight and sturdy. Each has been primed many times with oil gesso applied with a large palette knife, then like the panels each receive a dark base color either warm or cool

depending on the image to be used. The colors chosen are mixed with an alkaline medium made by Gamblin called galkid, sometimes I add a little bit of g-gel to this mixture as well, this medium has the capacity to dry fast while fully extending the color and its vibrancy while adding a glossy sheen when dry that looks as if it is wet This treatment needs to be applied with a palette knife as well for maximum efficiency in coverage and smooth texture. The stretchers need to lay flat when complete for at least four to six hours before they can be placed up right to finish drying twelve more hours. It is best each coat dry about twenty-four hours before the next can be applied, each panel receives about three coats. Next I approximate the major tones in each photo keeping them in groupings of two, and I will mix about five colors per group. Then to these colors I add mounds a lot of thick impasto extenders, for the panels I mix the paint into hot wax, and for the stretchers I mix the paint with an alkaline extender also by gambling called g-gel. When mix-ing these secondary foundation colors I use about three parts paint and seven parts medium extender, making heavy use of my medium while extending the more costly color. When these are all mixed I begin to place them on the stretcher with a palette knife, keeping the colors in there own perspective and contained groups, using all the mixed medium until the first tonal layer is covered with much lighter tones. The Panels are a bit different in this respect because I have to melt the wax in a pan over a hot plate and mix color, then pour the wax quickly onto the surface in a splattering motion and fast because it dries fast an I need to work fast to cover as much of the base layer as possible. Next I have to smooth out the drips and puddles of hardened wax until the surface is smooth and the entire dark base layer is covered and unnoticeable. Now back to the canvass stretchers because as soon as their secondary layer is applied I place them upright against a wall and project my images onto them, I use a subtractive scraffitto technique with clay tools, when I wipe off the lighter secondary layer the primary layer shows through. I will have to work fast because the alkyd based medium I have used in my

second layer is already setting up and will be tacky in minutes and unworkable within four hours. The projector helps me to make quick intuitive strokes with my tools and brushes as well as able me to extract as much detail from the medium in a timely fashion as it dries. I merely think of the projector as a tool to aid my process in allowing the intuitive mark that my hand makes and in economizing the time it would take to paint the image freehand, although some of my paintings are done freehand usually because they pose a challenge to my skills as an artist. Again this process is different when it comes to the panels; instead of carving into the wax right away I melt six or seven colors per group and apply it to the panel while it is in the horizontal position much like Pollock would have done. Then when I have used all the mixed colors sufficiently I blend them and flatten them out by melting them into the secondary wax layer. I had initially hoped to scrafitto into the wax layer as well until I ran into some fat over lean issues as well as realizing that it would have been better for me to tone the raw wood with the dark color rather than coating it with chalk gesso first. It so happens that the chalk was too soft to carve over top of and was easily marred and scratched revealing the white chalk. So instead of relying on scrafitto tactics I simply painted additively with the encaustic paint, starting with subdued and toned down colors building up to highlights and high key colors as the layers progress. Again I used the projector to aid in my speed, economy, and gestural mark, also because the encaustic dries within seconds and needs to be applied with a quick and assertive hand. After each color is applied it must be reheated so that it can fuse to the layer below it, if I do not the colors are prone to cracking, chipping and flaking. This approach has yielded a more impressionistic broken brush feel and look resembling pastilles. The wax medium offers a more pastel and subdued tonal structure than that of the oil, so I intend to go back into the paintings with some thin glazes of oil color, to heighten some colors as well as punch up highlights and knock out some darks, also to create spatial contrast with the difference between gloss and matt surfaces.

I have been working in groups of two panels at a time, when I have four paintings complete I shuffle their order mingling their origins. But this is not the first time I use this tactic in the work, earlier on during the photo process I eliminate the photos that I do not feel are aesthetically pleasing or interesting enough to paint. I look for contrast in color, high and low key tones strong highlights and bold darks, I find by the time I am done selecting my images there is on an average of three to four images kept per roll of film, and of these I may paint one. This process takes a bit of time and it is almost like weeding a garden, the more time I spend weeding and sorting the more it fuels my inspiration by highlighting my choice of aesthetic, and the more successful I feel. I suppose it has a bit to do with the time invested in the images and its direct relation with the space being represented as well, It is as if my photos collect energy through my gaze they store it, then this energy is absorbed into the surface that I labor over further projecting upon it an aesthetically pleasing outcome. The more time I spend on the foundation the stronger the work becomes and the more assertive I can finish an image with excitement over using economic and subtle techniques. The images are then grouped and arranged further displacing their origin or their order of time, they are now ordered in groups and according to directional elements, tone, value arrangements, and basic aesthetic and gestalt principals. So once the moment I press my finger on the trigger is past and the further and further that time is distanced the less and less probable it is that the images will find or be placed in their original order. And even more so after the paintings are out of my hands after I have let go of them and they find themselves in other orders, Perhaps at hung in pairs or in triptych or quad groupings, then maybe singly or next to a mirror or a doorway or a window. The point is that I have no control over the destiny of my work and its order, I can manipulate it in the beginning during the creation but after I let go it is out of my hands and the order of life takes over, there can only be order in the present and the past needs no order to exist.

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