

INTERNATIONAL
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Artist Jordan Eagles finds beauty in animal blood

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SAN FRANCISCO:

Jordan Eagles' art is eye-catching glowing images that run the gamut of red, from vibrant rubies to darkest burgundy. That the pieces were made with animal blood adds a visceral kick.

Eagles, a New York City artist who was in San Francisco for a recent gallery showing, sees beauty in blood, and is intrigued by its physical and symbolic qualities.

"There's always an unpredictability factor and that's part of what makes my work, for me, interesting," he says. "Things occur that you might not expect. Ultimately, it's a matter of editing and being able to recognize the beauty and the nature of it."

But there's nothing of the brooding artist about Eagles, who's soft-spoken with clear, hazel-green eyes. And there's little that's overtly gory about his pieces.

Gallery director Mark Wolfe, who has an Eagles exhibit running through March at his Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art in San Francisco's Union Square, is taken with the way light interacts with the works.

"It's almost as if shining a 90-watt spotlight on the piece ignites some type of internal energy," he says.

"I think that Jordan discovered a particular quality of blood in terms of the way it reacts to light and that is his primary motivation. I don't think at all he was out to use blood for blood's sake to make a statement or to be exploitive."

Eagles, 31, has been drawing his entire life but was never that interested in paint. The big change came when he was in college and wanted to get just the right effect for a series on birth. He tried dripping red paint on canvas but "nothing was happening. It was flat to me."

But when he switched to blood, he says, "all of a sudden my enthusiasm for the work heightened. The pieces themselves suddenly became alive and they started to speak."

Blood turns brown left untreated, leading Eagles to his next stage, using resin as a preservative.

These days, Eagles creates his work by interspersing layers of blood and resin on slabs of Plexiglas. Larger pieces can take weeks and end up weighing 300 pounds as he builds up levels of intensity. He gets his blood from a New Jersey slaughterhouse, buying a gallon at a time and freezing that into small batches to prevent waste.

He usually starts by pouring blood onto a slab, sometimes using brushes or tilting the Plexiglas to get a particular effect. He may use paper towels to remove blood, creating shading and other effects. He uses BBQ-style skewers to produce more precise forms.

His work has become more abstract over time; recent works range from delicately spattered shapes reminiscent of Rorschach symbols to richly textured geometrical forms.

One piece on display in San Francisco, "Conduit," is a vivid red circle surrounded by a near-black background created by using aged blood. It seems as remote as a planet and yet as intimate as a blood cell. It is, said Eagles, about "looking at the universe and also looking at the world from a microscopic point of view, examining the extremes of the endless possibility of how far out we can go, from outer space to a single cell."

The use of animal blood has drawn the ire of an animal advocacy group, which picketed a show of Eagles' work last year in Hartford, Conn.

"We think its offensive," said Priscilla Feral, president of Darien, Conn.-based Friends of Animals.

Eagles says he doesn't treat his material lightly. Using blood from dead mammals adds meaning to his themes of regeneration, he says. "Here you're looking at art which is full of life and at the same time there is death merged with it and it represents all of life's cycle."

Blood and art go all the way back to the cave paintings of primitive man, said Ted Purves, a professor at the California College of the Arts.

There has also been modern use of blood in art, much of it involving performance art as opposed to Eagles' work which, except for the medium, doesn't appear to strive for shock value. British artist Marc Quinn came to prominence with "Self," a cast of his head made of his own frozen blood.

Using blood instead of paint is edgy. But is it art?

Purves sees artists in genre-pushing movements as "making things that are in dialogue with the art world. They're sustaining and pushing a relationship to art. At a certain point, that relationship to art doesn't mean anything, but I think in (Eagles') case, it obviously does."

Eagles, who has shows upcoming in New York City and Atlanta, gets all kinds of reactions when he tells people what he does for a living.

But "when people see the works, it changes. It's like, all of a sudden, you have to look at the image that you're seeing as opposed to what was in your imagination," he says. "You realize it's not really all that frightening and it's actually somewhat soothing."

On the Net:

<http://www.jordaneagles.com>

<http://www.friendsofanimals.org>

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