

Retrospective of Jill Krutick's Artwork

by Dylan Spencer

Imagine yourself sitting on a beach, watching the sun as it sinks below the water's horizon, cascading its golden rays over the water below. Really, imagine it. This is likely an accomplishable task; such an experience is essentially universal. Regardless, these words (nor the image they evoke) do not do the experience justice—there is just something about experiencing a beautiful thing for oneself that simply cannot be articulated in common language. It is the emotional efflux that comes with witnessing such an event for yourself, I suspect, that is responsible for this barrier of expression. Using language to express these corresponding emotions is an even more difficult task—how can we begin to articulate the emotions we feel if we cannot accurately articulate the experience causing those emotions? Perhaps the answer lies in moving away from conventional language to try to communicate these emotions. This has been Jill Krutick's objective in using abstract expressionism as a means of emotional expression.

It is important to clarify that Krutick does aim to replicate experiences in her works—her most recent Coral Reef series does not attempt to display a coral reef. Instead, she uses the canvas as an opportunity to convey the feelings of experiences. Focusing on the Coral Reef series's centerpiece, the 25-panel *Coral Beliefs*, aims to capture the emotions felt by Krutick when diving and viewing coral reefs for herself, as well as their fragility in the face of mass pollution and climate change. Krutick's explosive use of color and intricate use of texture in *Coral Beliefs* take observers to a hypnotic place in which the feelings of coral reefs are brought out, as if one was a coral reef for themselves. But to fully understand the Coral Reef series, it is critical to understand Krutick's past and decades-spanning relationship with art.

Krutick's love of art can be traced back to childhood trips to museums, wherein a devotion to Van Gogh and Monet was garnered. Specifically, Krutick cites their use of color and texture, and general focus on landscape—especially those displaying water—as the reasons behind her fascination. Of course, color and texture are precisely the two elements that Krutick has focused on since her entry into the professional art world over a dozen years ago.

While visual art played an important role in Krutick's upbringing, by the time she was a teenager, she had already made the difficult decision to focus on one skill. A high-level classical pianist, Krutick honed in on music, and was practicing more than six hours a day. Over time, she found herself drawn much more towards emotional pieces, instead of strictly technical ones. She references a Rachmaninoff prelude she played at Carnegie Recital Hall as being able to “differentiate herself as a musician... because it allowed her to show much more feeling.” With her earliest paintings being noticeably gridlike and technical, Krutick's art portfolio follows suit with this shift in preference. As with her musical proclivities, Krutick's journey as an artist shows a development of paintings that become ever-more free-flowing, expressive, open, and emotive.

In part, this gridlike rigidity can be denoted to Krutick's past work as a financial analyst. Prior to her professional entrance into the art world, Krutick worked in finance for over two decades, first at Salomon Bros, then at CitiGroup, and eventually helping spearhead Warner Music Group's initial public offering in 2005. Though most her focus during this time was on work and family, Krutick did still make time for painting. However, with the world of finance being as intensive and competitive as it is, she could only paint during limited time off and maternity-leave. Her corporate position at Warner Music eventually allowed for time to paint while taking art classes at The Art Students League of New York. After leaving Warner Music in 2011, Krutick committed to art full-time.



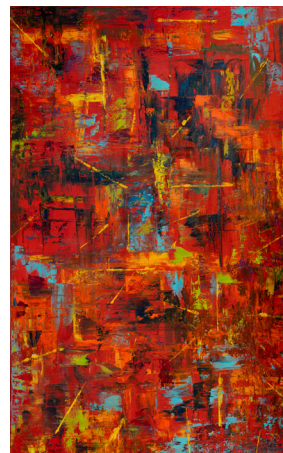
Jill Krutick pictured in her studio with her old english sheepdog, Buzz in front of Coral Beliefs, 2022

Geometric Series

The Geometric series—Krutick’s first professional collection of works—derives heavy influence from her corporate life. With the series’ first entry being created in 1993, *Walking on Sunshine* represents “a rigid lifestyle governed by mathematics, strategy, and algorithms.”



Walking on Sunshine, 1993



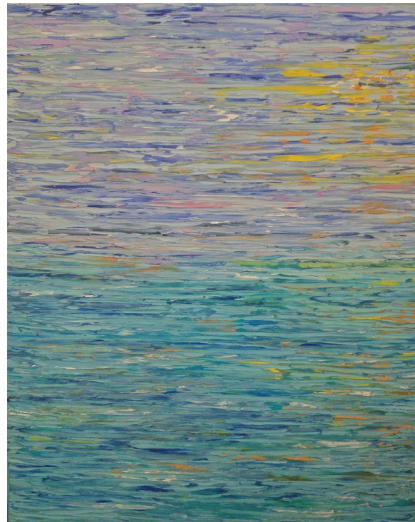
Rumba, 2019

As Krutick puts it, “after closing my chapter on Wall Street and the corporate world, my geometric paintings provided me with a comfortable platform to reflect on old routines and regain my artistic strength.” Unlike many artists, Krutick constantly revisits and reiterates on series past. While this does make tracking her progress as an artist somewhat difficult to express linearly, it allows for a unique introspection into her new perspectives on old concepts. This very evolution is apparent in her first series, which—while primarily serving as a stepping stone between her professional life in the corporate world and art world—has pieces created as recently as 2019.

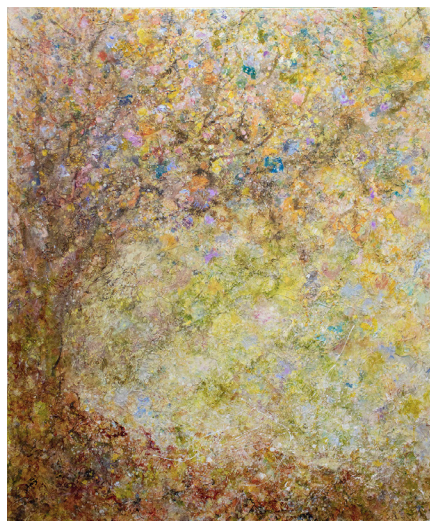
Rumba can be viewed as an exemplification of Krutick’s constant reflection on old routines, containing apparent overlap with *Walking on Sunshine* (most obviously, the spreading of paint via a palette knife—a signature of Krutick’s earlier style). But while some employed methods have stayed the same, these two pieces are fundamentally different—presenting them side by side to someone unaware, it would not be immediately obvious that they come from the same artist. While Geometric in nature, *Rumba* is significantly more free-form than *Walking on Sunshine*. It is without the same binding, grid-like structure apparent in the 1993 piece. While the brief yellow lines in *Rumba* promote some structure, they are far looser (despite their physical straightness) than the grid lines of the older. They serve as a successful artistic element of the artwork, rather than the core of the piece itself. In fact, there is no identifiable “core” of *Rumba*. Every square inch of the piece is detailed as much as the next. You could look at a subset of the piece and it would maintain the same feeling as the whole. In that regard, it serves as a successful expression of some emotion. This, I suspect, is an element she learned when creating the *Abstract Landscape* series, Krutick’s next focus.

Abstract Landscape Series

“Abstract Landscapes represent an early style of my creative portfolio and stems from my fascination with the natural world and love for Monet and Van Gogh. Since my early painting days as a child, I always sought to depict the same kind of tenderness and candor of the outdoors with which these masters achieved.” Even in landscape—which characterizes the act of physical subject matter being replicated on canvas—Krutick is not interested in the expression of physical things. Instead, she is drawn to an expression of those things. In Krutick’s works, the manifestation of physical things serves as an element from which to derive feeling, not as a means of expressing the thing itself. This approach can certainly be seen in the series’ earliest pieces, such as in *Sunrise*, but is perhaps most successfully executed when the feeling of the thing being expressed informs the expression of that thing itself, as seen in *The Giving Tree 7*.



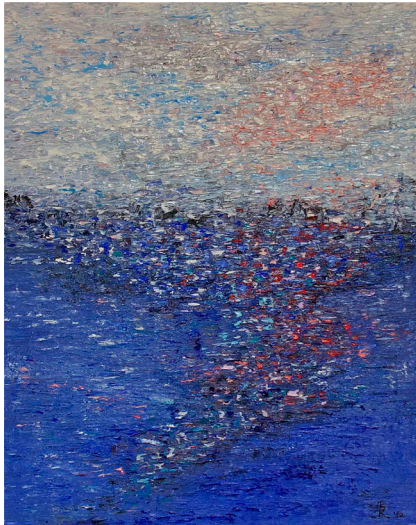
Sunrise, 2012



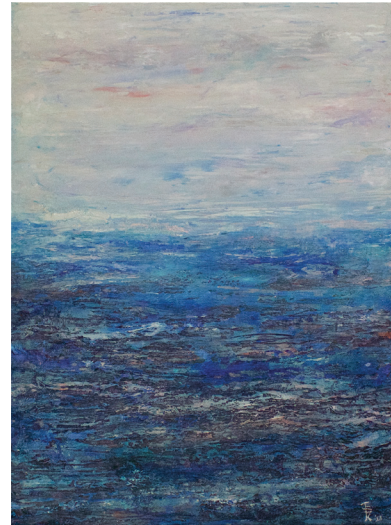
The Giving Tree 5, 2019

Dreamscape Series

The Dreamscape series exemplifies Krutick's experimentation with this very concept—it exemplifies an array of degrees to which the spirit of a given subject matter can direct how the subject is displayed. Its foundations take directly from the Abstract Landscape series, with its earliest pieces—Dreamscape 1, 2, 3, and Escape—being created while most of Krutick's output was Abstract Landscape works.



Dreamscape 2, 2013



Escape, 2013

The similarities between these two Dreamscape pieces and an Abstract Landscape piece like Sunrise are certainly palpable—so much so that they beg the question: why split off these pieces into a series of their own? Partially, because Krutick does not use series as a strict direction for pieces (as if to say, she does not necessarily sit down with intentions to create an abstract landscape piece so much as she aims to capture some sensation). Additionally, the Dreamscape series is essentially a sub-series of the Abstract Landscape series (with most of its pieces being focused on the relationship between sea and sky). But I believe the split mostly serves to highlight the foundations and inspiration for later Dreamscape pieces, which are quite unlike any Abstract Landscape piece.

Then, Krutick created Waves. Though the piece seems entirely focused on one half of the sea-sky relationship, the visual nature of waves of course only exists as a reflection of the sky. Then, there's Beach Day, which begins to blur the line between the two forces. Following is the Dreamscape Small sub-series, further abstracting the relationship at hand. And finally, the Dreamscape series took its shape with Surprise and Burst, wherein Krutick can successfully express not only the sea-sky relationship that the entire series is predicated on, but also the underlying bliss of a dreamscape with her color choice and use of line. As seen in the paintings, the Dreamscape series was not so much a development of color as it was a development of her use of color. Blues, pinks, and whites have been the most prevalent colors since the earliest Dreamscapes, but the ways in which they were used has developed extensively throughout the series.



Waves, 2015



Beach Day, 2016



Dreamscape Small 1, 2016



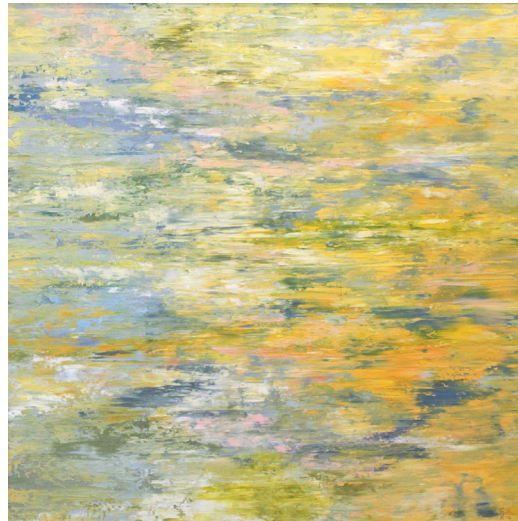
Dreamscape Burst, 2018



Dreamscape Surprise, 2016

Shangri La Series

The Shangri La series has its roots in the early days of Krutick's career, with pieces like *Silky Paths* being created in 2012. However, the series did not see much attention until 2017, when, two months after the creation of *Dreamscape Surprise*, she created *Shangri La 3*.



Silky Paths, 2012



Shangri La 3, 2017

With clear origins in the *Dreamscape* series, Krutick says “Painting idyllic, imaginary places like Shangri La became an escape for me—a place to explore, get lost, and re-center myself. The iterative process of layering and finding a balanced blend of colors and textures has become a meditative exercise and the birth of the Shangri La series.” Perhaps under this light we can view the Shangri La series as an iteration on the *Dreamscape* series with alternative inspiration—instead of the sea and sky, Shangri La is directed primarily by fields and trees.

Aurora Borealis Series

As with the relationship between the Shangri La and Dreamscape series, Krutick's Aurora Borealis series is simultaneously fundamentally like and essentially different from the two other series. The series maintains a few core elements that can be seen in the other two. Namely, it features an abstraction of the emotions and sentiments of nature, an imposing use of color, and the meticulous layering of paint. Unlike the other two series, though, Aurora Borealis appears primarily concerned with explosions of color—intentional or not, nearly every single piece in the Aurora Borealis series features at least one point from which color explodes. It, perhaps more successfully than the other series, captures feelings of ethereality and unearthliness, and emanates sentiments of inquiry into phenomena grander than ourselves (staying very true to its name). Independently, these three series represent commitments to particular color palettes, and a development of certain styles and skills. Collectively, they represent a comprehensive exploration of nature's three most prominent components, with a skyscape series (Aurora Borealis), landscape series (Shangri La), and a seascape series (Dreamscape).



Lady Liberty, 2012



Aurora Borealis Victory, 2021

Ice Cube Series

Krutick's Ice Cube series is quite unlike all others. It represents a single idea—that of overcoming adversity via quiet strength—in a simple and concise form. From the series's first painting more than ten years ago, to the most recent entry created last year, every single Ice Cube painting features a physical ice cube enclosing two fires, equidistant from the horizontal midline. In fact, every Ice Cube painting is effectively symmetrical about this line (effectively symmetrical insofar as the individual lines of the piece do not reflect perfectly about this axis, but the general features of the piece do). In this regard, it may seem inappropriate to bring up the series this late into Krutick's career. But unlike the other series, Ice Cube has numerous pieces from nearly every part of Krutick's career. The series first entrant was one of Krutick's first non-geometric paintings, and the last entrant was created after all previous series were conceived of and focused on. Therein, the progression of Ice Cube can be seen as an analog for the progression of Krutick as an artist.



Ice Cube, 2011



Ice Cube Black/Gold/Silver, 2016



Ice Cube Gatsby, 2020



Ice Cube Diamond, 2019

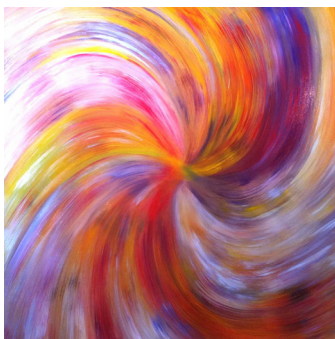


Orchid, 2018

Because the subject matter is the same, it much more clearly exemplifies Krutick's development as an artist, displaying a history of increasing comfort using an ever-expanding palette and a constantly-evolving utilization of texture (and even canvas shape). While these concepts may seem few in number, they represent fundamental concepts in painting that, when refined over the course of more than a decade, represent mastery on the part of the painter, and have palpable implications in their contemporary works. With humble beginnings as an extension of the Geometric series, the Ice Cube series has developed into a representation of a great portion of Krutick's career.

Swirl Series

Only three series lie beyond the scope outlined by Ice Cube. The first is Swirl, with most its pieces being created less than a month after the Ice Cubes, in late 2019. Like Ice Cube, it has undeniable roots in the Geometric series, but, unlike its predecessor, is without strict linearity. As should be expected by now, the first Swirl piece was created at the beginning of Krutick's career. Pinwheel, 2011 was an early piece, which was very "orderly" and unlike the jazzy swirls to come.



Pinwheel, 2011

Initially made using oil paint, and then acrylic, it wasn't until Krutick starting using acrylic molding paste, first with the painting Octopus, 2016, that the trajectory of her art career was fundamentally changed.



Octopus, 2016

This decision cannot be overstated—it represents an evolution to the next stage of one of the core elements Krutick had spent nearly a decade focusing on: texture. Of physical sturdiness and complete malleability, molding paste permitted Krutick to take everything she learned with layering paint to the extreme. The Swirl paintings pinpoint a critical engagement with three dimensions. Sure, Krutick had created meticulously textured oil paintings before this, but there is an essential difference between the built-up texture of an oil painting, and the jutting out of molding paste. Effectively allowing her to add sculpture to the canvas, these paintings set the stage for techniques that are extremely apparent in her most contemporary works. Therein, Swirl represents an opening of Krutick's approach to one of linear boundlessness. Akin to how jazz approaches the field of music, Swirl is an effusive, free-flowing approach to canvased art.



Rainbow Fish, 2017



Plenty 2, 2019



All that Jazz 1&2, 2020

In early 2021, Krutick embraced the free-flowing nature of Swirl, and took it to its extreme. This is the foundation of her Watercolor series. A fundamentally different approach to painting, the Watercolor series represents a development of trust and belief, where Krutick only controls the initial direction of the paint, but leaves the rest up to chance. This forced “stepping back” in addition to the nature of water color’s drying process necessitated a limited amount of time for Krutick to engage with each painting, thereby requiring her to become adept at balancing initial intention with uncertain happenstance, as well as develop a heightened understanding of and appreciation for the white space not filled by the somewhat-unpredictable water color.

Watercolor Series

To some degree, Watercolor visually delineates a coming together of all prior series. It certainly embraces the fluidity of Swirl (and thus, by extension, the Geometric series from which it is derived), a breaking and affirming of the symmetrical lessons of Ice Cube, an explosion of color featured in Aurora Borealis, and the masterful layering and color balance as learned in Shangri La and Dreamscape. Krutick describes Purple Splash 1, her first ever Watercolor piece, saying “Land and sky meet in this piece as churning purple, blue, and green waves careen upwards to meet with a sunset sky of yellow, and orange.” Via the description, it becomes clear that an underlying degree of synthetization between the three scape-series is taking place, and such becomes clear when viewing the piece itself. Perhaps it is the chancy nature of these paintings that encouraged Krutick to make this her most prolific series, but I like to think, as all her other series did in their entirety, Krutick could learn an incredible amount from each of the 240 (and counting) Watercolor pieces she produced.



Purple Splash 1, 2021

Coral Reef Series

This leaves us where we started with her final and most recent series, Coral Reef. While I do not want to harp on the series too much (as what better way to understand it than to experience it in-person for yourself), it is worth noting that Krutick describes the series as being the place that, in the massive world that is art, she sees herself committing years to exploring. The series allows for the use of an incredible array of mediums and styles (after all, it is a third-dimensional evolution of the Watercolor series, itself an amalgamation of all her past series), and the directions Krutick can take the series are therefore limitless. So now, go and experience that which cannot be described in words.



Coral Beliefs 1, 2022



Coral Beliefs 25, 2022

Dylan Spencer is an undergraduate student at the University of Chicago. Pursuing a B.A. in both Philosophy and Visual Arts, he is interested in exploring the particularities of life. Specifically, he aspires to highlight the shortcomings of modern society via conceptual art.