



Abstraction of Emotion

DRAWING ON A PAST CAREER IN SCIENCE, NORTH PORT ARTIST CAT TESLA PAINTS WHAT NATURE MAKES HER FEEL

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ABOVE: Painter Cat Tesla spends an average of six hours a day working in her North Port studio.

RIGHT: Tesla calls *A Taste of Honey*, oil and mixed media on canvas, 2024, a visual representation of what she feels when surrounded by nature.



ABOVE: The colors Tesla encounters on her regular hikes were the inspiration for *Young and Fun*, oil and mixed media on canvas, 2024.

Science may seem to most like the opposite of art, but for painter Cat Tesla, they're two parts of a whole.

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, Tesla excelled in the arts and sciences, but she wasn't sure which of those directions her life would take. She picked the science path during college and eventually dove into a career as a genetic counselor, researcher, and faculty member at Atlanta's Emory University. But, she never quite let go of her artistic aspirations.

"I think scientists are creative problem solvers, and that's how I view painting," she says. "You're facing a blank canvas or piece of paper and you're trying to transform it into something beautiful and meaningful."

Ten years into her career, Tesla submitted some of her paintings into a juried art show as an experiment to test her talent. Not only did she sell nearly all the works she displayed, but she also

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAT TESLA



ABOVE: *Spring Fling*, 2024, oil and mixed media on canvas, is reminiscent of a flock of birds in flight.

LEFT: An example of how Tesla pairs bold markings with soft ones to depict movement in nature can be found in *Flutter*, oil and mixed media on canvas, 2024.

won an award and an offer of representation by a gallery. “It was a very big weekend,” she says with a laugh.

Little by little, Tesla began to step away from her science career and evolved into a full-time artist, focusing her efforts on nature-based abstraction paintings. “Nature is really my thing,” she says. “I spend time hiking or doing mindful meditation and ask myself, ‘What does nature feel like?’”

Her example draws reference to Claude Monet who famously said he wanted to paint the way a bird sings. “The language of abstract is expressing emotion,” adds Tesla, whose work is carried by multiple galleries in Florida and across the United States. “I’m really trying to express how it feels to be in nature.”

Tesla treats painting much like she did science. Her lab is now a studio on the eight-acre property she shares with her husband in North Port in Sarasota County. There, she creates commissions for corporate and private clients, and teaches workshops to budding artists (an unexpected pursuit born out of pandemic online demonstrations). With her students and herself, Tesla strives to combine strong marks with softer passes of her brush. “I paint from memory and feeling,” she explains. “I’m not trying to render anything realistically, but nature is active, and it’s always moving because it’s something that’s breathing, alive, and exciting.” artbycat.com

RIGHT: Tesla’s studio at her home in North Point allows her and the students in her workshops to “paint large and audaciously.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAT TESLA