

Carol Rubin
"Frissons"

Artist's Statement, October 2016
Washington Studio School

Frisson – "a sudden, passing sensation of excitement; a shudder of emotion; thrill." A simple definition borrowed from the French because there was no such word in the English language.

My earliest memories of frissons are from my childhood in Florida: after driving two unexceptional hours to the ocean, as the car rises over the shore berm to reveal the endless expanse of sand and water; alone in my backyard before anyone is awake as the rising sun illuminates heavy drops of dew to the din of a million chirping creatures. I can clearly relive those early experiences of energy, deep and chilling, beginning to glow and warm--a crescendo of vibration that knocks you down with its power.

My friend Kendal Shaw, a chemist before he become an accomplished painter, acutely observes, "everything, you, me, the floor, the street outside, the ocean, air, is masses of atoms, vibrating electrons; all is energy, which we cannot make nor destroy, but energy can be endlessly transformed...The universe is a majestic hum of vibrating energy." It is the nature of our raw world, forever vibrating, forever shooting out glimpses of its genius.

Staying tuned to the hum is harder now as an adult, but the thrill is still incalculable. The moment when sunlight or a breeze fragments the stillness is endlessly exciting. The moment can pass quickly, but its kick to the gut can linger for days. I challenge myself to paint to re-experience the same gut kick. How does it feel to be deep within a thicket of foliage ("At the Flower Mart," "White Bramble,")? Can I find the nexus of its energy by observing it from the inside out? What is it about a crowd of bathers under the sun's glare at the shore, ("Weekend – Bradley Beach") so much going on that it breaks down into a vibration of small shapes familiar in the way they cluster. How do the hot white perpendicular lines of boat and mast intersect with ultramarine of the water to lock down an endlessly repetitive pattern that we understand with few clues("The Cruz")?

I like to begin with loose paint, working in rapid gestural strokes across the canvas. I feel the gesture with my arm, and use juxtaposition of color to create energy. As a southerner I need the light, I celebrate it, not with gray, but with color that evokes emotion. I build the surface, touching each part of the canvas multiple times as I set a rhythm. Surfaces come alive as I move through layers, adding and scraping, building surface texture, sharpening and softening. I start with a sense of what the painting is about, but it reveals itself in stages, layer by layer.

