



# Elizabeth Murray

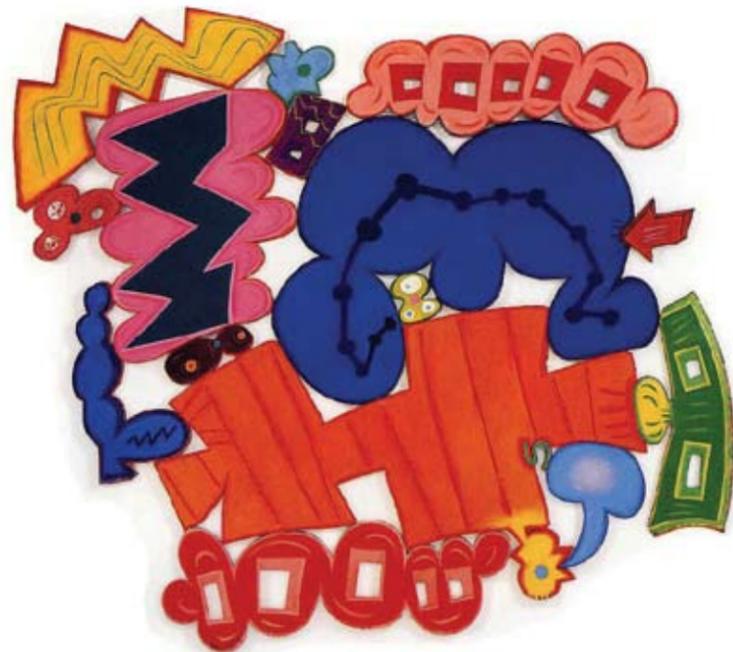
**Born**  
1940, Chicago, IL

**Education**  
BFA, Art Institute of Chicago  
MFA, Mills College, CA

**Lives and Works**  
New York City

**Media & Materials**  
Oil and watercolor painting,  
drawing

**Biography**  
Elizabeth Murray's distinctively shaped canvases break with the art-historical tradition of the two-dimensional picture-plane. Jutting out from the wall and sculptural in form, Murray's oil paintings and watercolors playfully blur the line between the painting as an object and the painting as a space for depicting objects. Breathing life into domestic subject matter, Murray's paintings often include images of cups, drawers, utensils, chairs, and tables. These familiar objects are matched with cartoon-like fingers and floating eyeballs. Abstraction is a key component in Murray's work. Taken as a whole, Murray's paintings are abstract compositions rendered in bold colors and multiple layers of paint. But the details of the paintings reveal a fascination with dream states and the psychological underbelly of domestic life.



"For a couple of years I've been working with cutting out shapes and kind of glomming them together and letting it go where it may, like basically making a zigzag shape and making a rectangular shape and a circular, bloopy, fat, cloudy shape and just putting them all together, and letting the cards fall where they may."

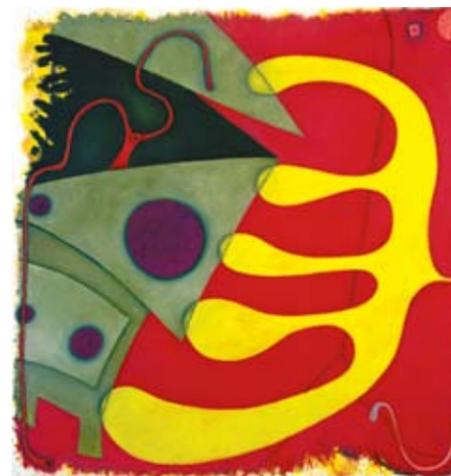


**Top:** Worm's Eye, 2002. Oil on canvas, 8 x 7.6' (244 x 231 cm). Photo by Ellen Page Wilson. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York. **Bottom:** Bop, Oil on canvas, 9' x 10' x 10' x 10 1/2" (2.7 m x 23 cm x 3 m x 27 cm). Photo by Ellen Page Wilson. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.

"When I really know certain things are working for me, they make me laugh. Like, 'Oh! This is really silly!' And I just enjoy that. And I think for myself it's part of what gets me through, just being able to laugh at things. Not that you can laugh at everything, but there are things, as human beings, that we just laugh at and we need it. And I think that's just the life part in my painting that's really important to me. It's not something I consciously do or that I consciously want. As if I say, 'Oh, I want to make this wacky, funny, goofy painting.' It really is just what comes out. It's the most rudimentary part of the paintings, and I guess it's the most basic part of me. I don't like sentiment, and I don't like nostalgia. And I think the humor has to be something really goofy and really wacky. It can't be cute."

"You're posing problems for yourself. It's kind of like a battle of you against you, and you are trying to figure it out. Like, I'll think I have it and I'll change one color and instead of it being the solution it becomes this big mess."

**Right:** Empire, 2001. Watercolor on paper, 18 x 7 1/2 x 1 3/4" (45 x 19 x 5 cm). Photo by Ellen Page Wilson. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York. **Below:** Open Drawer, 1998. Oil on canvas, 9.3 x 9' (2.8 x 2.7 m). Photo by Ellen Page Wilson. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.



"I remember trying to paint with my son hanging onto my leg. He just grew up in my studio and he always had a lot to say about my work and, whatever he said, he was always right about it. I learned to listen to him."

"Just, you know, 'Mom, why is that shape red? I think it would be interesting if it were blue, and I think it would be interesting if you made a curve down there. What you should do is have that yellow go all the way across the space.'"

### Activity Suggestions

Keep track of what makes you laugh over the course of a day or a week, and make a chart identifying what kinds of humor inspire you to laugh. Then create an artwork, story, or performance that uses the various elements of humor collected.

Select a mundane object, an abstract shape, a still-life, or a landscape, and draw or paint it to convey different stylistic moods and characteristics such as wackiness, seriousness, sadness, frustration, etc.



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