



# Crescendo:

Eve Drewelowe's Momentum towards  
Rebellious Self Discovery

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Exhibition Catalogue

University of Iowa  
Art of Curation: Designing an Exhibition | Spring 2026





## Crescendo:

Eve Drewelowe's Momentum  
towards Rebellious Self Discovery

### I n t r o d u c t i o n

This exhibition is the result of a semester-long, student-led project developed by members of ARTH:4070 The Art of Curation: Designing an Exhibition (Spring 2026). Over the course of the semester, students collaboratively researched, interpreted, and presented the work of Eve Drewelowe, producing the interpretive texts, exhibition catalogue, interactive activity, 3D model, and accompanying social media content featured here. The exhibition reflects not only sustained scholarly engagement, but a shared effort to understand Drewelowe's work on her own terms.

At its core, the exhibition explores Eve Drewelowe's lifelong pursuit of artistic and personal self-definition. As a woman working across much of the twentieth century, she continually negotiated expectations surrounding gender, style, and professional identity. Her gradual movement toward abstraction and her experimentation with medium reflect this ongoing negotiation, mirroring the fluidity of femininity and selfhood throughout her personal life. Rather than settling into a single aesthetic or role, Drewelowe consistently reshaped her practice in response to experience, environment, and conviction.

Drewelowe's life and work demonstrate that identity is not fixed or fully realized in a singular moment. Instead, it is an active, evolving practice—one embedded in process, material, and dedication. Her devotion to art functioned as a central facet of her identity not only as an artist, but as a woman asserting autonomy in a world inclined to categorize and confine. Through her willingness to shift styles, experiment materially, and resist imposed labels, Eve Drewelowe offers a compelling case study in the refusal of easy definition. This exhibition invites viewers to consider identity as something continuously formed through making, resisting, and becoming.

— Anna Isbell

## Annaleise Tone



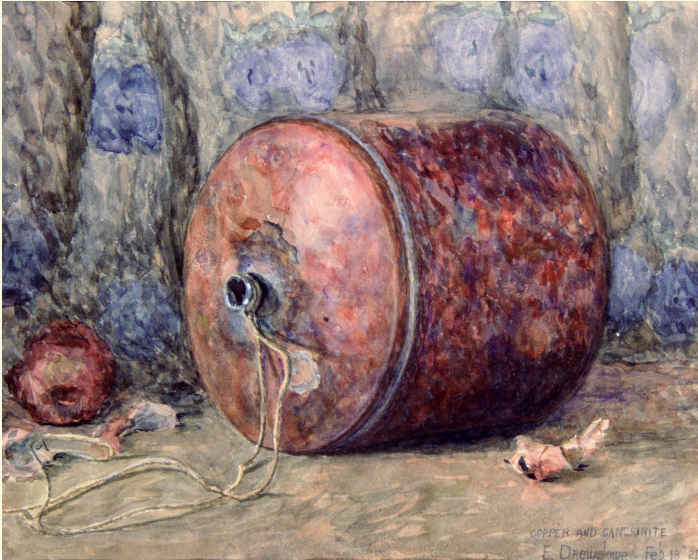
### ***Get off the fence of you'll go nowhere,*** 1915

Drawing (graphite on paper)

From an early age, Eve Drewelowe's mission in life was to become an artist. She described her ambition as "First! Foremost! Always! My waking thought from an embryo on was my need to be an artist!" That determination is evident in one of her teenage works, *Get off the fence, or you'll get nowhere*, where both the slogan and the assertive figure visualize a young artist urging herself toward action and public recognition. Even early on, Drewelowe understood that she would have to fight for her own success. In the male-dominated art world, women were rarely viewed as professional artists, and their work was often valued less than that of their male colleagues.

Throughout her youth, Drewelowe felt an incurable need to create and experimented with many creative outlets. In school, she was discouraged from making art, since it was not part of the curriculum until she reached college. She even recalled hiding her drawings from her teacher, fearing repercussions for drawing during class. Although her mother trained her to sew, crochet, and embroider, these activities did not satisfy her artistic need; she viewed them as busywork. Instead, Drewelowe saved her own money to buy art supplies when her family could not afford them, often drawing on cheap newspaper rather than in a sketchbook and with little access to color. Her later work, by contrast, celebrates color: as her style evolved and matured, she moved from the muted, darker tones of her early career toward warm, lively colors that complement her increasingly abstract compositions.

Antonia Baafi



### ***Copper and Cancrinite*, 1921**

Watercolor on paper

Painted during Drewelowe's undergraduate days, then twenty-two years old, *Copper and Cancrinite* announces from the very onset of her career an artistic insight entirely her own. Whereas her contemporaries, specifically women trained in the early twentieth century, were expected to turn their attention to flowers, domestic interiors, or idealized figures, Drewelowe chose to paint a weathered, rust-encrusted industrial vessel resting against a soft blue-grey background. "Copper" in the title refers, of course, to the large container in the center of her image. The small object in the lower right may be a piece of "cancrinite," a silica based mineral.

The subject is unglamorous, overlooked, and industrial. And yet she renders it with genuine tenderness, the warm ochres, purples, and burnt oranges of the corroded copper pronounced against the cool chalky blues behind it. These choices are not incidental. Drewelowe seems to declare that Beauty does not require prettiness. This is a quiet refusal to paint what a young woman in 1921 was supposed to paint. *Copper and Cancrinite* contains in miniature the entire argument of her career, that she would look at what interested her, on her own terms, and find there something worth seeing.



Elene Kodanashvili

***A Page of my Past*, 1933**

Oil paint on canvas

A pensive uncertainty lingers in the eyes of the young Eve Drewelowe, unposed and slightly out of place in an awkwardly frilled dress. Painted when the artist was thirty-four, *A Page of My Past* is a rare, quiet counterpoint within a body of work better known for bold color, formal experimentation, and an increasing interest in surrealism. In a sea of bold, unconventional, and unapologetic work, this image reads as an homage to her younger self: a return to the person she once was, before her confidence as a painter fully took shape.

As a child, Drewelowe quickly discovered her affinity for creating visual art, but was stifled by people and institutions around her who maintained the idea that bold and experimental painting was not a viable profession for a woman. She carried that tension into early adulthood, wrestling with creative suppression until she was able to pursue art seriously in college.

By the time Drewelowe was training and exhibiting, opportunities for women in technical or applied practices had expanded, but expectations for “fine art” often coded authority as masculine and relegated refinement to the feminine. At the same moment, critical taste increasingly rewarded individuality and experimentation, pushing ambitious artists to take aesthetic risks that could be professionally perilous. For women, those risks were compounded by bias: innovation had to be proved, defended, and re-proved in order to earn the same attention granted to male peers.

Seen against Drewelowe’s later self-portraits, *A Page of My Past* looks back with dramatic tenderness. It marks the beginning of a distinctive voice—formed not in spite of pressure, but through it—while acknowledging the vulnerable, searching self from which her mature artistic identity emerged.



**626 Thirteen St. Boulder, Colorado, 1930**

Ink drawing on paper

This drawing depicts the exterior of the first house in which Drewelowe lived with her husband, Jacob Van Ek, after their marriage. The couple hosted frequent dinners and gatherings that echoed the parties Drewelowe had known in childhood, when her mother entertained. Yet domestic hospitality carried a cost. Over time, the responsibility and large amount of work required of her began to interfere with her career as an artist. Additionally, Drewelowe also struggled with illness that made it increasingly difficult to maintain her current social life.

The changes that reshaped her private world became visible in the design of the couple's second house, a project in which both Drewelowe and Van Ek took an unusually hands-on role. Drewelowe hired specialists in woodworking, ironwork, and landscaping to realize a carefully articulated vision, treating the home as a constructed environment aligned with her artistic priorities. An example of this is the purposeful omission of a dining room, which sends a clear message of her prioritizing her career as an artist over marital expectations.

Additionally, a newspaper article about Drewelowe's home noted that nearly every interior wall was covered with her own paintings, blurring the line between studio and domestic space and suggesting how art permeated her daily life. Drewelowe also designed and made wooden furniture specifically for these rooms, extending her aesthetic control to everyday objects. While her first house is associated with marital roles and expectations, the move into her second house represents her passion for her art and her determination to be a painter.



Virginia Iversen

***Reincarnation*, 1939**

Watercolor on paper

*Reincarnation* is a seminal work that marks a new beginning for Eve Drewelowe, both in life and in art. In her mid-twenties, she began suffering from gastrointestinal issues that would shape her daily life, and her health continued to decline through the 1930s. Though genetics likely played a role, Drewelowe also linked her worsening condition to the added strain that came when her husband became a university dean—a position that carried numerous responsibilities, often unpaid and unrecognized, for the dean's spouse. She took on the extra work, yet later journal entries return to this period with frustration at how little her health was considered, by herself and by others, even when the pain was unbearable.

In 1939, Drewelowe was admitted to the Mayo Clinic and treated for food allergies and an ulcer, but her distress persisted and she was eventually prescribed bed rest. *Reincarnation* depicts the artist curled inward on a bed in a room crowded with furniture and decor. The bed's exaggerated proportions and the space's bold details make her small figure seem swallowed by its surroundings. Clues to her illness are included in the composition; the green thermos on the floor, for example, is a reference to the artist's liquid-only diet during this difficult time. The scene is static, yet almost overwhelming—capturing the dissonance between *looking* healthy and *being* healthy. To an outside viewer, it might read as a woman sleeping peacefully; to those who know her story, it registers as endurance of her pain.

Still, Drewelowe viewed this as a new chapter in her life, writing that “the reincarnation opened up a new chapter in my life, invoked what I consider . . . a new beginning, an abrupt shift from the past . . . My existence, my efforts became immersed in mining discoveries and additions. It was a wonderfully, constructively exciting period of my life.”



Dania Green

***Pirouetting Paddies*, 1942**  
Oil on Linen

Eve Drewelowe's extensive travels throughout the world played a significant role in shaping her subject matter, pushing her work beyond the personal and into carefully observed environments. From expansive views of buildings and agricultural fields to portraits of the people she encountered, these experiences influenced not only what she painted but also how she structured her compositions. In *Pirouetting Paddies*, Drewelowe turns her attention to the landscape of the island of Java, translating a specific place into an expressive visual rhythm.

Working in her distinctive style, Drewelowe employs deep blues and earthy browns to carve out the contours of the terrain. Rows of rolling rice terraces dominate the canvas, forming a rhythmic pattern that moves steadily across the surface. Details of burnt sienna and burnt umber define rocks, trees, and valleys, adding texture and warmth while reinforcing the sense of motion embedded in the land. The repetition of these forms creates a visual pulse, suggesting both continuity and movement within the landscape.

Drewelowe revisited this subject across multiple works and mediums, demonstrating a sustained interest in how a place can be defined, transformed, and reimagined through artistic interpretation. Rather than striving for a literal depiction, she constructs a landscape driven by expression and sensation. The painting feels fluid and dynamic, as though the land itself is in motion, extending beyond the edges of the canvas and inviting viewers into an experience shaped as much by memory and emotion as by observation.



Elene Kodanashvili

***Crescendo***, 1949  
Oil paint on linen

A dynamic showstopper and Eve Drewelowe's first entirely abstract painting, *Crescendo* emerged after a period of bed rest following a serious illness in the late 1930s. The work signals a decisive turn toward experimentation and a preoccupation with change. Overlapping circular and sunburst forms cascade across the picture plane, framing an intentionally ambiguous subject and creating a sense of movement. The title reinforces this momentum: in music, a crescendo is a gradual increase in volume that builds toward a climax, and Drewelowe invites viewers to "hear" that rising intensity in visual terms. For her, music and painting were intimately linked modes of expression.

As a student she pursued vocal studies with enthusiasm, but financial constraints and an ever-growing commitment to painting forced her to abandon formal musical training. Even so, she continued to credit music as a generative influence on her art. In a journal she reflected on the difficulty of separating the two mediums: "The painting with note—; the painting with oils—it is truly difficult to separate them. I have always felt a generous overlapping of the two arts, for the one begins long before the other is ended. A painting, is it not possible for it to have the rhythm of symphonic music and the lyrical quality of a song?"

We see that belief in *Crescendo*. Its rhythmic repetitions and expanding forms read like measures of sound while also pointing toward the dynamic surrealist energy that would characterize many of her later compositions. If Drewelowe regretted leaving music behind, this painting suggests she never truly did: she translated musical structure into color, movement, and pulse, advancing toward the increasingly experimental language that would define her career.



### ***His and Hers*, 1961**

Crayon and mixed media on paper

*His and Hers* is a stylized depiction of a newlywed couple. Despite the featureless, rounded faces, the bride and groom are identifiable through the traditional black tuxedo and the white bridal veil. This subject matter reflects Drevelowe's complicated relationship with marriage. She married Jacob Van Ek in 1923 and they moved to Boulder Colorado a year later when he got a job as an assistant professor. He quickly became a full professor and in 1929, he was appointed dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Regardless of their happy marriage, Drevelowe was expected to assume the responsibilities of a dean's wife, which restricted her career as an artist. However, instead of conforming to these expectations, Drevelowe eventually continued to paint and disregarded societal conventions.

The colorful abstraction in the background and the texture of the painting are achieved through Drevelowe's use of crayons in this work. This choice of medium refers to her monochromatic childhood, where she was discouraged from creating art and did not have many art supplies. In her autobiography, Drevelowe specifically mentions how inaccessible color was in her youth and that she didn't even have simple tools like wax crayons. Both the painting's subject and material display the artist's rebellion against the expected.

## Annaleise Tone



***Non Sum Qualis Sume***, 1962  
Mixed Media

*Non Sum Qualis Sume* is Latin for “I am not as I used to be,” a title that directly reflects Drewelowe’s evolving artistic identity. This work is one of her mixed media paintings, composed of wood scraps and splinters arranged into a carefully constructed composition. The title speaks to Drewelowe’s continual stylistic development, with her turn toward mixed media marking another deliberate step in defining her artistic voice. Her introduction to mixed media began in the early 1950s during the construction of her home with her husband. During this time, Drewelowe translated the skills she acquired and the leftover materials from the building process into her art, incorporating discarded wood into her practice and forging a uniquely individualistic style.

Drewelowe’s mixed media works are distinctly her own, drawing little inspiration from established art movements or the styles of other artists. Her process for creating these pieces also differed significantly from her usual painting practice. Rather than working on an easel, she composed the works horizontally, carefully arranging the elements and finalizing the design before permanently adhering them to the canvas. She then applied a polyester resin to ensure the longevity of her selected materials. *Non Sum Qualis Sume* features minimal pigment, instead emphasizing exposed wood grain, irregular cut shapes, and natural coloration. By foregrounding the inherent qualities of the materials themselves, the work reflects Drewelowe’s embrace of transformation—both in her medium and in her artistic self-conception.



Dania Green

***No! No! Never!***, 1970

Oil on Linen

Drewelowe's loose, colorful style of the 1970s is fully realized in *No! No! Never!* The canvas explodes with color behind a portrait of a Black woman with an afro and wearing a yellow dress. She stands upright with her head held high, her wide stance creating a sense of grounding and stability. Six elongated silhouettes, which appear frequently in Drewelowe's work during this period, surround her, alongside organic shapes in yellow, orange, green, brown, and blue. These forms activate the background, creating a sense of movement and energy that frames the central figure without overtaking her presence.

Rendered at a commanding scale, the woman's presence feels unmistakably significant. Although her face is not defined by specific features, she stands apart from the surrounding forms as a figure of calm and self-assurance amid visual intensity. This contrast heightens both her individuality and her strength, positioning her as a steady counterpoint to the energetic environment around her.

Throughout her life, Drewelowe continually reshaped her identity and asserted her independence. Rather than conforming to the expectations imposed on women, she forged her own path. By the time this painting was created, she had navigated both personal and professional challenges, and her work reflects that perseverance. The confidence and vitality of this portrait suggest a broader awareness of how women—particularly Black women—have had to claim their identity, composure, and right to exist on their own terms.



Virginia Iversen

***Celebrating Cleopatra*, 1980**

Mixed Media

*Celebrating Cleopatra* is a unique homage to an iconic woman in history, one that reveals much about Eve Drewelowe and her relationship to feminism. Cleopatra’s legacy of strength, femininity, and leadership has long been entangled with misogynistic narratives, most often centering on her beauty. Rhetoric frequently links Cleopatra’s success to her visual appeal and so-called feminine wiles, suggesting that the Pharaoh seduced men to secure power. By tying her authority to her sexuality, these narratives imply that Cleopatra’s power depended on men and that she possessed little agency beyond her body. This logic has permeated dominant culture to such an extent that it is rare to find depictions of Cleopatra that portray her as anything more than a beautiful woman—making Drewelowe’s painting particularly compelling.

Like Cleopatra, Drewelowe’s personal writings reveal a lifelong struggle to be recognized independently of the men in her life. She repeatedly asserted her feminine autonomy through her use of her maiden name, her rejection of the prefix “Mrs.,” and her refusal to conform to traditional “wifely duties,” choices that were highly unconventional for her time.

*Celebrating Cleopatra* employs bold, abstract forms in colors historically associated with ancient Egyptian art to convey reverence not for Cleopatra’s physical beauty, but for her life and essence—without reference to the men around her. The work does more than commemorate Cleopatra as a historical figure; it honors the very idea of feminine autonomy itself.

Antonia Baafi




***Maverick*, 1984**  
Oil paint on linen

She stands holding her palette, brush in hand, striped shirt vibrant with color, her gaze direct and utterly unperturbed. Eve Drewelowe painted *Maverick* at eighty-five years old and titled it herself. The word needs no further explanation. She knew exactly what she was: “I am an artist, undeniably, and nothing can ever change that.”

The painting is both retrospective and alive. Behind her, the canvas erupts in the loose, exuberant brushwork of her abstract period, the same bold language she had been developing since her post-illness transformation in the 1940s. The figure herself, however, is rendered with the confident realism of her earlier years. The two modes coexist without tension or struggle, just as they did in the artist herself. *Maverick* is not a conclusion; it is a summation: a painter at the end of a long career looking back at everything she built and finding it good.

Thought to be one of her last paintings, *Maverick* closes the arc that *Get Off the Fence* opened in 1912. The girl who told herself to commit, who petitioned for a degree that didn't exist, who insisted on keeping her name, her studio, and her singular vision for more than seven decades, is still here—palette in hand, looking directly at you, entirely herself.



This exhibition was curated by the students of the course:  
Art of Curation: Designing an Exhibition.

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