

biography

Eric Dever has exhibited widely including, New York, Paris, Hong Kong and Los Angeles. His paintings can be found in the permanent collections of Grey Art Museum/New York University; The Heckscher Museum, Huntington, New York; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York. Dever is represented by Berry Campbell, New York.

On Monday, 18 August 1986, I boarded TWA flight 840 departing Los Angeles International Airport at 8:30 am. I arrived later that day after 4:30 pm in New York at John F. Kennedy International Airport with a suitcase and a check for \$2000, my life savings in my wallet. I had just turned 24.

Artist Marcia Hafif, my advisor and mentor recalls, "...even in our first interview getting him into NYU art studies, I found him to be an unusual young man, and we did have a good rapport. Interesting to hear about his memories of a meeting at my loft with the class—and potato chips. I thought they needed to know more about an art life so took them to see about grinding pigments as well as what a studio looks like." —S. Ravitz, personal communication, March 10, 2017

I have been painting all my life, and until the last 2 decades, supporting myself with part time jobs. As early as high school I elected a full art program, and received and completed a full summer precollege scholarship at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles near MacArthur Park. I was accepted to New York University in 1986 (MA'88-studio art) where I concentrated on painting. My paintings were informed by the urban landscape and iconic symbols of civilization. These post modern subjects and themes, loosely painted with oil paint and emulsified wax represented an attachment to enduring forms: obelisks, sculpture, containers—reliquaries, a personal response to the escalating AIDS Pandemic. Looking back, it was really painting itself, and a fascination with the materials and methods of painting, that has always sustained my focus. The way I paint is who I am.

Bethesda Fountain in Central Park commemorates the 1842 opening of the Croton Aqueduct, which supplied New York City with fresh water. The sculpture and fountain, *Angel of the Waters* was designed by Emma Stebbins and dedicated in 1873. Stebbins became the first woman to receive a commission for a major work of art in the city of New York. She linked the pure city water flowing from the fountain to the healing powers of the biblical pool.

My version, is a mixed media painting on burlap and titled, *fall*. Fallen leaves and sticks pressed into wet plaster grip the saturated warp and woof of sized burlap. An all over coat of amber shellac, scraped down in places reveals white plaster. Stapled tar paper and a piece of branch rest in the dark hued pool. I completed the painting in 1987 in time for my NYU graduate exhibition at 80 Washington Square Galleries East in the Spring of 1988. Playwright Tony Kushner understood the symbolism of the curative powers of the water from the biblical fountain of Bethesda and, appropriately, set the final scene of the Perestroika section of the AIDS-themed play *Angels in America* at this location in Central Park in 1993.

After graduate school I set up my studio in Williamsburg-Brooklyn, and 2 years later another in the East Village, and began exhibiting in alternative spaces and academic galleries throughout much of the United States. Gallery representation followed on Eastern Long Island (1992), Albuquerque (1994), and New York City (1997). Highlights included a solo exhibition at the Hudson River Museum and Le Cloître des Billets in Paris (1991). A portion of my portfolio (1990-99) was translated into print for illustration purposes and published in *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, *Harvard Business Review*, and by St. Martin's Press.

I moved to Eastern Long Island in 2002. By then the subject of my work had become the material properties of paint itself, at first limiting my palette to Zinc and Titanium white, enabling me to uncover a white spectrum ranging from opacity to translucency. Elisabeth Akkerman and the Francis Greenburger Collection in 2004 commissioned 8 white paintings. Going forward I added black, widening the range and force of the work which led to a sensation of working with properties of light. The compositions were largely geometric and included circles graded from dark to light. These paintings were exhibited in *Grey Matter* at the Painting Center in New York, *Doucement* at ParisCONCRET in Paris, and presented in an illustrated essay by Rose, "Dever," *Maquinariadelanube*, describing half a decade of my black and white paintings among a number of far reaching historical antecedents.

I began testing prepared red hues in 2011 and arrived at Naphthol Scarlet, a modern replacement for Vermillion. Working through some of the earlier compositions I found the range and quantity of tones to be staggering, all from combinations of red, white and black. Relative color, so eloquently presented and discussed by Josef Albers, emerged in this work. Background painting incrementally became foreground, with a second coat of evenly spaced and graded strokes or bars of color displaying a pulsing metallic quality made visible as similar values of opposite tones are placed alongside. In an exciting sense color, for me, also became material.

"...A series of eight paintings whose color he [Dever] has limited to variations on red, white and black — in effect, editing out all other colors in his exercise in artistic redaction," followed. —Karin Lipson, *The New York Times* 'Shredded, Sliced, and Covered-Up,' Islip Art Museum (2014).

Robert Dash, painter, poet, asked me in 2011 to teach a painting class, which he also critiqued weekly at his Madoo Conservancy in Sagaponack, New York. The Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, invited me in 2014 to implement and teach a sequence of classes examining 'Materials and Methods,' inspired by my own painting and process.

Contemporaneous paintings began to be presented in new and important venues: gallery representation and an exhibition with Berry Campbell Gallery, New York (2014); Art in Embassies, United States Consulate, Hong Kong and Macau (2014); *Clarity, Passion and Dark Inertia*, Kimmel Galleries, New York University, New York (2015), a painting from the exhibition was selected for the Grey Art Museum/New York University Collection (2016); followed by *Light, Energy and Matter*, William H. Hannon Library, and Master of Arts in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California (2017); and currently, *Seeing Red: From Renoir to Warhol*, at the Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, New York.

On August 30, 2012, *The Painting Plays* opened at Guild Hall in East Hampton, New York, an exciting collaboration featuring Joseph Pintauro, playwright *Cloud Life*, and a large oil on burlap painting on stage with the same title by Eric Dever. A prescient work, "... which Pintauro admires for what he sees as its

struggle between Dever's signature reductive color minimalism and the artist's morphing into representation..." —Joan Baum, 'When Art Inspires Playwrights,' *The Sag Harbor Express*

I began a garden adjacent to my studio with 24 rose plants that I had won in a raffle at the Madoo Conservancy in 2011, most have faded since and only 10 remain. Native cedar, milkweed and thistle have taken their place. An imperiled Copper Beech bears witness to these changes and contributes seedlings to the mix. A snake lives under the centerpiece of the garden original to the property, a concrete figure with a raised right arm and missing hand. I had worked with a limited palette of red, white and black for 10 years, which midpoint became a personal exploration of material nature as one might discover in yogic studies—I had a sense of mixing light, energy and matter. The introduction of red to the work led me to consider more carefully the roses in my garden, plants and landscape—nature itself.

Illness and loss brought mortality into focus, and like breaking a long fast, my palette opened to the full color spectrum, reflecting the garden, plants and surrounding trees. Purposeful neglect has coincided with an interest in re-wilding bringing to mind Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscape* (1965) at La Guardia Place-NYU. Hedgehogs and deer are now at home among rabbits, raccoons, including hawks, crows and osprey far overhead; while native holly, birch, poplars, cherry, oaks, long established plants, bee hives and pollinators flourish.

A local newspaper notes participation in the Art in Embassies exhibition at the U.S. Embassy residence in Helsinki, "Designing Landscapes: Expression and Evolution," 2022-25. "The Helsinki exhibition features Dever's mural scaled, oil on canvas diptych, titled October (2016), Dever's self-identification with nature is echoed in his sampling of colorful morning glory blossoms which form the scaffolding of this painting. The blossoms were found within a 3.6 mile radius of Dever's Water Mill studio garden and echo the distance and collection of pollen by bees whose hives are tended onsite. Dever's oeuvre embraces both materiality, craftsmanship and a history of shared growth between the artist, his garden and painting." —*The Sag Harbor Express*, 2024

Unpainted canvas, or ground as shape, contribute to an atmospheric openness in the paintings, spreading and breathing. Some sections or shapes of unpainted canvas are formally revealed as negative space, and more personally a meditation on absence. Automatism, methods of mining the unconscious popularized by the Surrealists, breathes life into the work. Exhibitions exploring these interests include: *Painting in a House Made of Air* (2019), *To Look at Things in Bloom* (2022) at Berry Campbell Gallery, New York.

"Dever's painting approach also involves exchanging shapes between canvases, often through a imprint process of painting onto a surface and transferring that to a canvas. "These repetitions of forms and other planned elements, together with his more gestural painting of the rest of the canvas, creates a charged tension between spontaneity and organization...one of the ways de Kooning worked." —Jennifer Landes, 'Color Unabashed in Eric Dever's New Show in Chelsea,' *The East Hampton Star*

An early pandemic studio view published in *Hyperallergic*, reveals paintings and a closer inspection of the unfolding spring palette resulting from mindful walks, looking up and focusing on the blossoming tree canopy. Forms appear weightless and at times dematerialize reversing figure and ground. These sensations inform my work today becoming examples of a type of compressed time, featured in *The New York Times* article by Stacey Stowe, photographed by Brian Derballa.

As a recipient of a 2020 Warhol Foundation/Nature Conservancy-Montauk Project Artist residency, at the eastern most tip of Long Island, I had the opportunity during the Pandemic to test the limits of canvas and linen in the resulting 17 paintings, responding directly to the Montauk site, nearby Montaukett tribal lands and the blue summer hues of twilight that the French call *l'heure bleue*. A selection of these paintings were exhibited at the Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York (2021); and The Heckscher Museum of Art, *The Rains are Changing Fast: New Acquisitions in Context*, Huntington, New York (2024).

By no coincidence, I feel drawn to *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* by the Japanese ukiyo-e artist, Hokusai and his paintings of the natural world. Ukiyo-e art also influenced the Impressionists and Post Impressionists to focus on the subject only, eliminating excessive details or complicated backgrounds, and an understanding of the beauty of a 'flat' appearance in artwork. At NYU, I had spent time in Krishna Reddy's printmaking Color Atelier with Bill Paden, who taught the techniques and materials of traditional Japanese wood-block printing, mokuhanaga. Personally, I found it very difficult to cut and prepare the wooden surfaces and registration notches, but mixing the paints, grading paint and burnishing it onto surfaces has stayed with me.

"This new body of work stands in contrast to what I first observed in Dever's painting years ago, when he imposed on his artistic process a serious and disciplined exploration of material and method....Not surprisingly, Dever's new pictures do not seek to replicate nature, but instead vibrate between representation and abstraction,...Dever doesn't paint nature, he paints his experience of it." --Gail Levin, PhD. Distinguished Professor at Baruch College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, author of *Lee Krasner: A Biography and other books*.

Dever's paintings have been shown in solo and group exhibitions in many venues including: 80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, New York; ARCO Plaza, Los Angeles, California; Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock; Arizona State University, Phoenix; Art in Embassies, U.S. Department of State: Hong Kong and Macau Consulate, and Embassy Residence Helsinki, Finland; Art in General, New York; Elaine Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York; The Buddy Holly Center, Lubbock, Texas; Centre d'Art et Rencontres, Saint Just en Bellengard, France; Eastern New Mexico University, Portales; Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York; Heckscher Museum of Art, New York; Hudson River Museum, Hastings on the Hudson, New York; Islip Art Museum, New York; Kimmel Center, New York University, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California; Marymount University, San Pedro, California; Molloy University, Rockville Centre, New York; Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, New York; Ohio State University, Marion; The Painting Center, New York; Paris CONCRET, France; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; Sag Harbor Whaling and Historical Museum, Sag Harbor, New York; Spaces, Cleveland, Ohio; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Dever's paintings are part of notable public collections including Centre d'Art et de Culture, Château d'Escueillens, Saint Just en Bellengard, France; Division Street Editions and The Reutershan Educational Trust, Sag Harbor, New York; The Francis J. Greenburger Collection, New York; Grey Art Gallery, New York University Art Collection; Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York; The Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, FishBridge Park; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; and numerous corporate and private collections including the Coca Cola Company, Atlanta, Georgia; Mark Hampton; Sub Zero Freezer Company, Madison, Wisconsin; and Lady Juliet and Somerset de Chair.

