

Eric Dever Biography

Born 1962 in Los Angeles, California, Eric Dever graduated from Westchester High School in 1980 with a precollege full scholarship to Otis College of Art and Design, which he completed, later graduating from California Lutheran University (BA'84).

In September 1986, Dever boarded a plane at LAX bound for JFK with a suitcase and \$2000 to begin graduate studies at New York University (MA, Steinhardt'88). Artist Marcia Hafif, his 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)

In the early 1990's, Dever established studios in Williamsburg, Brooklyn followed by the East Village, working part time in the architecture firm of I.M. Pei and Partners for over a decade, while painting and advancing his own work in museum, academic and gallery venues nationwide and overseas. Highlights include one person exhibitions at the Hudson River Museum, Hastings on the Hudson, New York; Nicholas Davies Gallery, New York; and Le Cloitre des Billets, Paris, France. A portion of his painting portfolio was published as editorial illustration in *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, *Harvard Business Review*, and St. Martin's Press.

Dever moved to Eastern Long Island in 2002, limiting his palette for 4 years to Zinc and Titanium White, which enabled him to uncover a white spectrum ranging from opacity to translucency, while developing a heightened sensitivity to the properties of the linen, canvas and burlap, providing both surface and support in the work. In 2007, Dever was commissioned to paint a suite of 8 white paintings for The Francis J. Greenburger Collection by curator Elisabeth Akkerman.

In 2010 Dever added black, widening the range and force of the work. The new compositions were largely geometric including grayscales and circles graded from dark to light. Exhibitions of the resulting paintings include, *Grey Matter* at the Painting Center in New York, *Doucement* at ParisCONCRET, followed by an illustrated essay, Rose, "Dever," *Maquinariadelanube*, Barcelona, 2011.

On August 30, 2012, *The Painting Plays* opened at Guild Hall in East Hampton, New York, featuring Joe Pintauro, playwright *Cloud Life*, and a large oil on burlap painting on stage with the same title by Eric Dever. A painting "... which Joe Pintauro admires for what he sees as its struggle between Dever's signature reductive color minimalism and the artist's morphing into representation..."¹

Dever began testing prepared red hues and by 2012 had arrived at Naphthol Scarlet, a modern replacement for Vermillion. Working through some of the earlier compositions, relative color, so eloquently presented and discussed by Josef Albers, emerged in this work. Background painting incrementally became foreground displaying a pulsing metallic quality made visible as similar values of opposite tones were placed alongside. In an exciting sense, color itself had become material for Dever.

"...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,"² followed in an exhibition at the Islip Art Museum, *Redacted*, curated by Janet Goleas in 2014.

One artist exhibitions followed, including Berry Campbell Gallery, New York (2014); Molly College, *The Rose Chapel*, Rockville Centre (2014); New York University, *Clarity, Passion and Dark Inertia*, Kimmel Galleries, New York (2015-16); Loyola Marymount University, *Light, Energy and Matter*, Los Angeles, California (2017). Dever's work was included in the permanent collection exhibition, *Parrish Perspectives: Art in Context*, curated by Alicia G. Longwell at the Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York (2017). His paintings were on view in the U.S. Consulate General Hong Kong and Macau, Art in Embassies, Department of State exhibition (2016-19), and featured in a lecture by Gail Levin, Distinguished Professor of Art History, Baruch College and the CUNY Graduate Center, *American Art and India: Cultural Exchange Among Artists of India and the United States*, at the Pollock Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, New York (2016).

January 2019, Gail Sheehy recounts:

“The joyful shock of walking into Berry Campbell’s Chelsea art gallery was to see an exhibition saturated with color. I made a beeline to the artist, my dear friend Eric Dever, to find out what had possessed him to explode his palette. Starting a decade ago, he restricted his palette to white and black, venturing only as far as the addition of red. I leaned in to the artist’s ear and whispered, ‘This change must have come from here,’ touching his chest. ‘Is this about Joe?’ His expression shifted from the commercial smile of a solitary artist forced to entertain his followers, to one of man grieving a dear friend. He nodded.

Eric worked intimately with the brilliant playwright Joe Pintauro. The two shared a love of the painterly and writerly disciplines. After valiantly fighting cancer, Pintauro died last May in Eastern Long Island, where both men had studios. Eric told me that Pintauro had written a play from which Eric took the name of his exhibition, *Painting in a House Made of Air*. The play was inspired by a memoir of grief that spoke to Pintauro.

As Eric guided me around his large oil paintings, he told me how he had been consoled in his own grief by the splurge of color among the flowers that blossomed in his garden. The entire color spectrum opened up to him. He told me he has used only a six-color palette in these extraordinary paintings, but their richness comes from his mixing of oils to create vibrant new colors and the tension between spontaneity and organization of forms.

The gallery owner, Berry Campbell, laughed when I mentioned this extraordinary shift of subject. ‘I took on Eric five years ago to represent a minimalist,’ she said. ‘Little did I know he would evolve into...’ her head swiveled with a broad smile of pleasure, ‘THIS!’”³

The shift began when Dever let go of the square, moving to a rectangular format loosened up his compositions, there was no longer a central area of interest, but multiple areas of concentration. More striking, is Dever’s rediscovery of color—not just one at a time, but the entire spectrum coupled with an awareness of the Indian and yogic notion of the *chakras*, 7 energetic centers in the human body where matter and consciousness meet.

“The show...comes alive with the artist’s unabashed use of saturated, matte, electric, and often acid color. The paintings offer scattered references to Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, and even Andy Warhol.”⁴

“Color theory can be taught. Color phenomenology has to be submitted to as if it were a cruel and mute master. Dever, for four years in the 2000s, restricted his palette entirely to Titanium and Zinc White. That

is how the current works at Berry Campbell come into being with such rightness, though his palette since then has burst open like spring.”⁵

“July 16, *Lavender Pilgrimage* (2018) may be the first predominately purple abstract painting I've ever seen that didn't succumb to the hue's clownishness. He accomplished this by adding various whites, including that of the canvas. Much else is at that level or better, including sonorous intonations like *April 1st, Hellebores I* (2018). May the discovery never end.”⁶

Dever's painting approach also involves exchanging shapes between canvases, often through a monoprint 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.”⁷

A Thousand Nows, an exhibit of 22 new paintings, opened at Suffolk County Community College's Eastern Campus Lyceum Gallery in January 2020. These paintings harken from experiences deep within Dever's sensory memory of growing up in California. “Los Angeles is subtropical, the sun is more intense and sets over the Pacific, but the blue hues I am mixing echo the long late spring and summer twilight of the Northeast.”

In *Drive-By-Art* (Public Art in this Moment of Social Distancing) May 2020, organized by Warren Neidich, Dever paints his experience of an emerging spring during the onset of the pandemic, and the neighborhood tree canopy close to home. Forms appear weightless and at times dematerialize reversing figure and ground. These sensations inform Dever's work today becoming examples of a type of compressed time, featured in *The New York Times* article by Stacey Stowe, photographed by Brian Derballa.

Dever was selected as an Andy Warhol Project Artist at the Warhol Montauk Preserve, completing a body of work in 2021 about the site and greater Montauk including paintings inspired by ancestral Montaukett land.

At the invitation of artist Robert Dash, Dever inaugurated in 2012 the first painting classes, which were critiqued by Dash at the Madoo Conservancy, Sagaponack, New York. Dever actively continues to present innovative classes and workshops at the Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, where he has also spoken on the museum's permanent collection and exhibitions including *Parrish Perspectives: Art in Context*, James Brooks, docent talks and Dever's own oeuvre in *PechaKucha-Volume 19*.

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 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; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Marymount University, San Pedro, California; 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; 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.

¹Baum, Joan. (2012, Aug 30). "When Art Inspires Playwrights," *The Sag Harbor Express*. Retrieved from <http://www.sagharborexpress.com>

²Lipson, Karin. (2014, May 4). Review: "Shredded, Sliced, and Covered-Up," *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>

³Sheehy, Gail. (2019, Jan 13) Gail Sheehy, Facebook Page

⁴Landes, Jennifer. (2018, Jan 17). Review: "Color Unabashed in Eric Dever's New Show in Chelsea," *The East Hampton Star*." Retrieved from <https://easthamptonstar.com/Arts/2019117/Color-Unabashed-Eric-Dever's-New-Show-Chelsea>

⁵Franklin Einspruch. (2019, Feb 18) Review: "Eric Dever: Painting in a House Made of Air Berry Campbell" *The Delicious Line*. Retrieved from <https://deliciousline.org/review/364>

⁶Franklin Einspruch. (2019, Feb 18) Review: "Eric Dever: Painting in a House Made of Air Berry Campbell" *The Delicious Line*. Retrieved from <https://deliciousline.org/review/364>

⁷Landes, Jennifer. (2017, Apr 6). "Eric Dever: A Year of Discovery," *The East Hampton Star*." Retrieved from <https://easthamptonstar.com/Arts/2017406/Eric-Devers-Year-Discovery>