

biography

For nearly a decade I limited my palette to white, black and then red...Like breaking a long fast, I began working with the full color spectrum and a palette prepared with 7 hues...

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 Gallery/New York University; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York. Dever is represented by Berry Campbell, New York.

One way that I like to think about the trajectory of my life as an artist is how it relates to geography--latitude and longitude.

I was born 1962 and raised in Los Angeles near the 35th parallel north, which is subtropical. Agapanthus or Lily of the Nile flowers and Calla Lilies grew alongside our driveways and houses. The sturdy Bird of Paradise plant and flowers are drought resistant and continue to grow on local traffic islands. Bird of Paradise flowers follow the same contour of the earth around the globe, through North America, the Atlantic Ocean, Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, Asia, and the Pacific Ocean, as evidenced by photos, accounts, and international postage stamps. I graduated from Westchester High School in 1980 with a precollege full scholarship to Otis College of Art and Design, which I completed, later graduating from California Lutheran University (BA'84). On Monday, August 18th, 1986, I boarded TWA flight 840 departing LAX at 8:30 a.m., arriving later that day in New York at JFK, with a suitcase and my savings in my pocket.

The balance of my art education and career has been spent just above and below the 40th parallel north. As I began graduate studies at New York University (MA, Steinhardt'88). Artist Marcia Hafif, 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." ¹

I enjoyed spending time on rooftops and was fascinated by the these views. Darker skies, long shadows, a Northeastern urban palette characterized a portion of the year. I worked at the New Museum of Contemporary Art on Lower Broadway as a security guard, opening and closing padlocked security gates, doors, shutting off the alarm in the morning and setting it in the evening. Looking back, I realize that much of the darkness in my palette was not entirely from sampled color or atmospheric.

Trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art were like time travel. Their collections and presentations of humanity; became the subject of my painting: an effort to tuck myself into time, forms and ideas that seemed to have prevailed. Fear, and artistic sublimation were among my initial responses to the AIDS crisis, which became an epidemic, and ultimately a pandemic. In March 1987, playwright and AIDS activist Larry Kramer established the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), which became one of the most effective health activist groups in history. Playwright, writer Joe Pintauro wrote *Raft of the Medusa*, his characters reflected the diversity of the epidemic, including homosexuals, heterosexuals and bisexuals, conservatives and liberals, black, white and Hispanic, rich and poor alike, first performed in 1990.

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. The figure was preparing to depart, proudly. 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.

During the early 1990's, I had a studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn followed by another in the East Village, working part time in the architecture firm of I.M. Pei and Partners for over a decade. Highlights include one person exhibitions at the Hudson River Museum, Hastings on the Hudson, New York; Nicholas Davies Gallery, New York; and Le Cloître des Billets, Paris, France. A portion of my painting portfolio was published as editorial illustration in *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *St. Martin's Press*.

I began visiting Eastern Long Island after graduation and moved there in 2002 limiting my palette for 4 years to Zinc and Titanium White. This enabled me 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, I was commissioned to paint a suite of 8 white paintings for The Francis J. Greenburger Collection by curator Elisabeth Akkerman.

The Introduction of black in 2010 widened 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, by Rose, "*Dever,*" *Maquinariadelanube*, Barcelona, 2011.

Yoga studies led me to red, and an inward journey exploring the qualities of light energy and matter themselves, principles discussed in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita. I 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.

"...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.

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..."³

In 2013 I was offered representation by Christine Berry and Martha Campbell, a courageous and astute partnership forming Berry Campbell, a gallery in New York. I had been abstracting a single rose from my garden, working increasingly with gesture, pressing paint loaded surfaces onto the support, ultimately spanning twenty six, 6 x 6 foot canvases. A selection of these paintings were featured in my first exhibition at Berry Campbell in 2014, and traveled to the US Consulate General of Hong Kong and Macau for an Art in Embassies, Department of State exhibition, 2016-19.

One-artist exhibitions followed, including 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) 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).

Like breaking a long fast, I began working with the full color spectrum and a palette prepared with 7 hues, for my second exhibition at Berry Campbell in 2019. Summer twilights are sometimes called the gloaming or *l'heure bleue*. This "blue hour" is most represented in my painting when much of New York, and the Northeast are in full bloom.

In 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!'" ⁴

"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." ⁵

"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." ⁶

"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." ⁷

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." ⁸

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 within my 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 where I am living now.

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.

“The outdoor *Drive By* exhibition on Long Island included works installed on properties from Hampton Bays to Montauk, with social isolation as just one theme. No one was supposed to get too close to each other over the weekend during a drive-by exhibition of works by 52 artists on the South Fork—a dose of culture amid the sterile isolation imposed by the pandemic.”⁹ I had never before considered exhibiting paintings outdoors, which I mounted on tomato stakes in front of my studio, greeting a very welcome parade of visitors as they made their way up and down the highway. I was impressed by these kinds of adaptations which speak to human resourcefulness and resiliency.

I continue to enjoy and find meaning presenting workshops, especially the Creative Studio at the Parrish Art Museum, and the continuing interaction and education the experience provides me. The discovery of monotype techniques by Degas and the imprinting or decalcomania, of Max Ernst and Dubuffet, inform my own painting. At the invitation of artist Robert Dash, we inaugurated the first painting classes in 2012, which were critiqued by Dash at his Madoo Conservancy in Sagaponack, New York.

In 2020, I completed a Warhol Foundation/Nature Conservancy-Montauk Project Artist residency. The Warhol Reserve is located at the eastern most tip of Long Island, paintings from this project highlight the palette of seasonal blue northeastern summer hues. I am not a plein air painter, I complete my work in the studio. Visiting the site, I was impressed by alternating sensations of heat, strong sunlight, and a cool ocean breeze. As the landscape is drained of sunlight, summer twilight takes over, and a moments glimpse of a seemingly impossible ocean palette. Midpoint through the project, having left the actual Warhol site and exploring adjacent Montauket ancestral lands and vistas, I found myself taking cues from Andy Warhol’s self portrait pairing complementary or opposite colors on coarse linen and cotton. The paintings at times resemble silk screen. and include a reimagined view of Scallop Pond from Paumonok Path, the path itself is dedicated to the Montauket King, Stephen Talkhouse Pharaoh.

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, *mokuhanga*. 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.

For the past two years, I have been reintroducing line and drawing into my work. Hellebores are among the few flowers which bloom in the winter with blossoms under the snow. I began *Dark Hellebores* (2021), drawing with white oil pastel on the linen, followed by sprayed on paint, then poured paint, before working back in with brush and knife with a thicker paint consistency. More walks and observations follow a second pandemic spring, though increasingly elegiac. Dogwood and Lilac flowers bloom simultaneously, and line continues to enter the paintings, back and forth, both drawing and painting

Summer Storm, Tipping Point, is informed by telephone conversations with West Coast family and friends struggling to breathe in the proximity of devastating fires, and finally our own direct experience of ash and smoke, observable in the form of darkened skies, an oddly crimson sun and poor air quality throughout the

Northeast. A glimmer of hope exists in the yucca's unique restorative or air purification capabilities. A return to the Agapanthus, a large diptych, explores the formal qualities and use of negative space as in Chinese and Japanese screen painting

I am proud to participate as this year's Parrish Art Museum 2022 Artist Resident. To date, we have safely worked with 252 students from area schools spanning 4th grade through high school including life skills groups. The resulting mural is currently being prepared with care by the museum and will span 7 rows of 36 columns, totaling 54 feet long, to be installed in the center spine of the museum, March 12th and on view through May 1st, 2022. I am reminded by this project how young people are also a true force of nature, including the power and directness of their own painting and drawing. We have a lot to learn from each other.

Talks are an important way artists communicate with and engage community, I've been invited as a guest speaker, live and online, some video recordings are available online:

2022 Nature into Art with Eric Dever, Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, New York

2021 Eric Dever, guest speaker, *The Art Market*, ART, Gail Levin, Distinguished Professor. The City University of New York, Baruch College

2019 Q&A: A Thousand Nows, with Eric Dever and Helen Harrison, Director, Pollack-Krasner House and Study Center, Lyceum Gallery, Suffolk County Community College-Eastern Campus, Riverhead, New York.

2019 Q&A: Painting in A House Made of Air, with Eric Dever and Jesse Bransford, Clinical Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Art & Art Professions Department Chair. New York University/Steinhardt. Berry Campbell Gallery, New York.

2017 Light, Energy and Matter, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California.

2017 Eric Dever: Abstraction Then and Now, an Artist's Journey, Coffee House Club, New York.

The Artist's View: Eric Dever on Parrish Perspectives: Art in Context, curated by Alicia G. Longwell at the Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York

PechaKucha, Volume 19, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York.

2016 American Art and India: Cultural Exchange Among Artists of India and the United States, by Gail Levin, Distinguished Professor of Art History, Baruch College and the CUNY Graduate Center. Pollock Krasner House Lichtenstein Lecture Series, East Hampton, New York.

2015 Clarity, Passion and Dark Inertia, New York University, Kimmel Center, New York.

2014 Brain Food: Eric Dever on the Parrish Permanent Collection, Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York.

2014 The Rose Chapel, Kaiser Art Gallery, Molloy College, Rockville Centre, New York.

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.

¹ S. Ravitz, personal communication, March 10, 2017

² Baum, Joan. (2012, Aug 30). "When Art Inspires Playwrights," The Sag Harbor Express. Retrieved from <http://www.sagharborexpress.com>

³ Lipson, Karin. (2014, May 4). Review: "Shredded, Sliced, and Covered-Up," The New York Times. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>

⁴ Sheehy, Gail. (2019, Jan 13) Gail Sheehy, Meta (page)

⁵ Landes, 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>

⁶ Franklin 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>

⁷ Franklin 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>

⁸ Landes, 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>

⁹ Stacey Stowe "A Drive-By Art Show Turns Lawns and Garages Into Galleries," Art and Design, The New York Times, New York, 12 May 2020, C2.