

Arte, libros, cine, conexiones. Alta fontanería

A detailed technical drawing of a complex mechanical assembly, possibly a watch movement or a similar precision instrument. It features numerous gears, levers, and springs, with various parts labeled with numbers and letters. The drawing is rendered in a fine-line, hatched style typical of technical illustrations.

(maquinariadelanube)

Dever Published on September 12th, 2011 by Rose



LUC XIV, Eric Dever, 2010

If I showed my six year old nephew this painting by **Eric Dever** (Los Angeles, 1962) he would surely tell me he sees a planet, or perhaps a hole. An observer familiarized with the rudiments of planimetry might see in the image the conventional

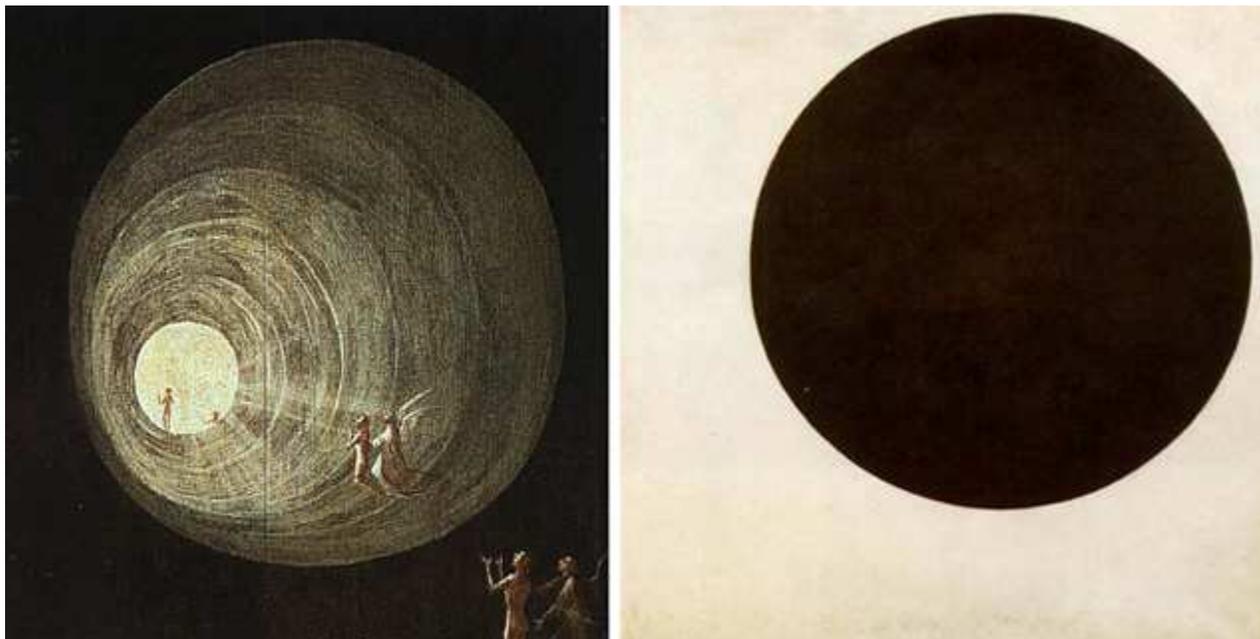
manner in which the relief of a mountain or of an ideal island is represented. For a physicist a wave of light or a force field, a deep hole in the ice or the hypnotic pupil of a fabulous white animal. I do not believe these interpretations would bother Eric Dever much, because none of them fully deny the ultimate nature of what we actually see, a canvas tightly set upon a frame which was carefully covered with paint. That is what all paintings are. As for myself, I needed a high school teacher to introduce me to the proverbial LINK pipe by Magritte to start discerning, or stop seeing clearly, as it happened after the Zen master hits his disciple with a cane. What is painting but an ocean of variable, infinite visions that reduced to the obvious are but a pile of paint blobs over a flat surface, no more, no less. Although some of these paintings are valued like gold, we do not know exactly why, or better yet, we do not want to know why.



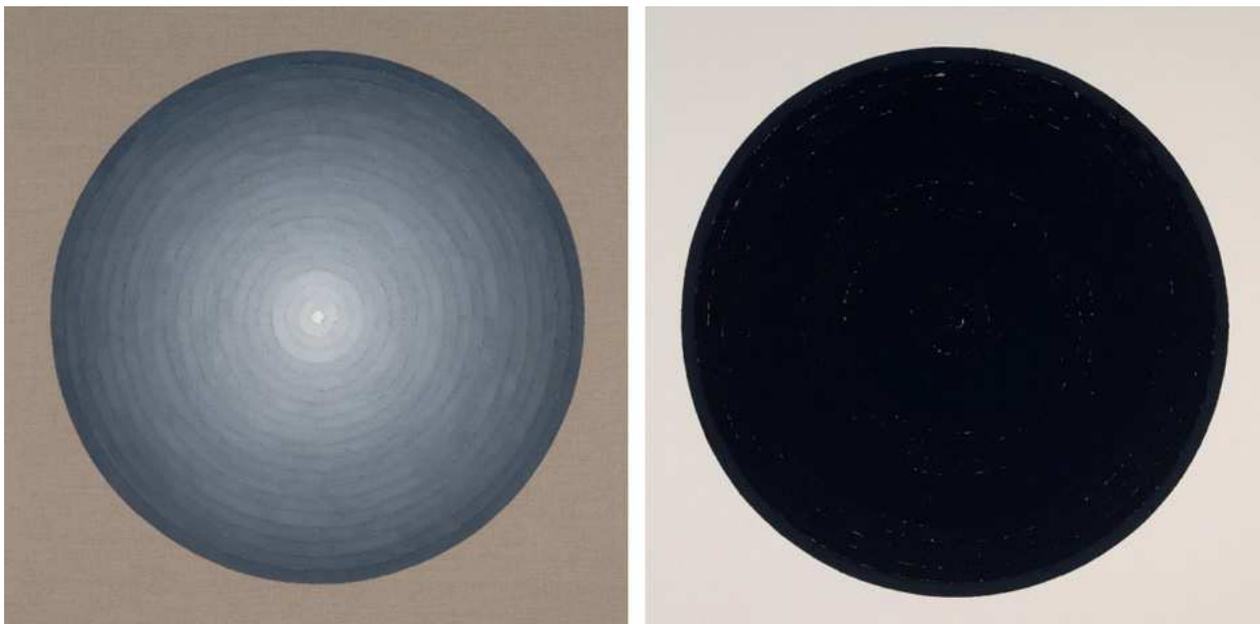
LUC XV, Eric Dever, 2010

Georges Braque's father was a theater set painter, and it is said that the future Cubism pioneer was deeply influenced by having grown up seeing the back side of old backdrops every day, huge surfaces filled with patches in dull tones with imperfect geometry. This detail seems much too anecdotal to explain, by itself, such a complex phenomenon as Cubism, but it stresses the need for a radical modification of point of view when it comes to dealing with the irruption and development of abstraction in contemporary art. **Malevich's** gesture when painting a black square over a white background around 1915, was far from being the exploit of the hero who discovers a new continent. In keeping with Braque's anecdote, we would rather say that Malevich behaved like a mason who after staring dissatisfied for a while at a painted wall, decided to remove all the paint and then the plaster to finally reach the bare bricks, breaking them up as well, and finally installing a sober door so solid that since then, luckily, nobody was able to brick up again. This door allows us to see the surface of the paint on both sides,

from the side of figurative illusion, and the reverse scaffolding over which that figurative representation rests. Both facets of the painting had always coexisted inseparably but inadvertently, and what Malevich did was but match both planes, getting the painting to disclose by its own means, the notion of structure and finding, in the categorical and the absolute, the suitable resource for expressing a transcendent emotion. Eric Dever's geometric compositions follow a trail that goes from Russian Suprematism to the American school of abstraction, but the variations established regarding the tonal balance and the proportional relation by which they are governed belong, by their own right, to painting and its foundation, independently of the chronological context.



Rise of the Blessed to the Celestial Paradise (detail), Bosch, ca. 1490; Black Circle, Kasimir Malevich, 1915



LUC XIII and LUC XI, Eric Dever, 2010

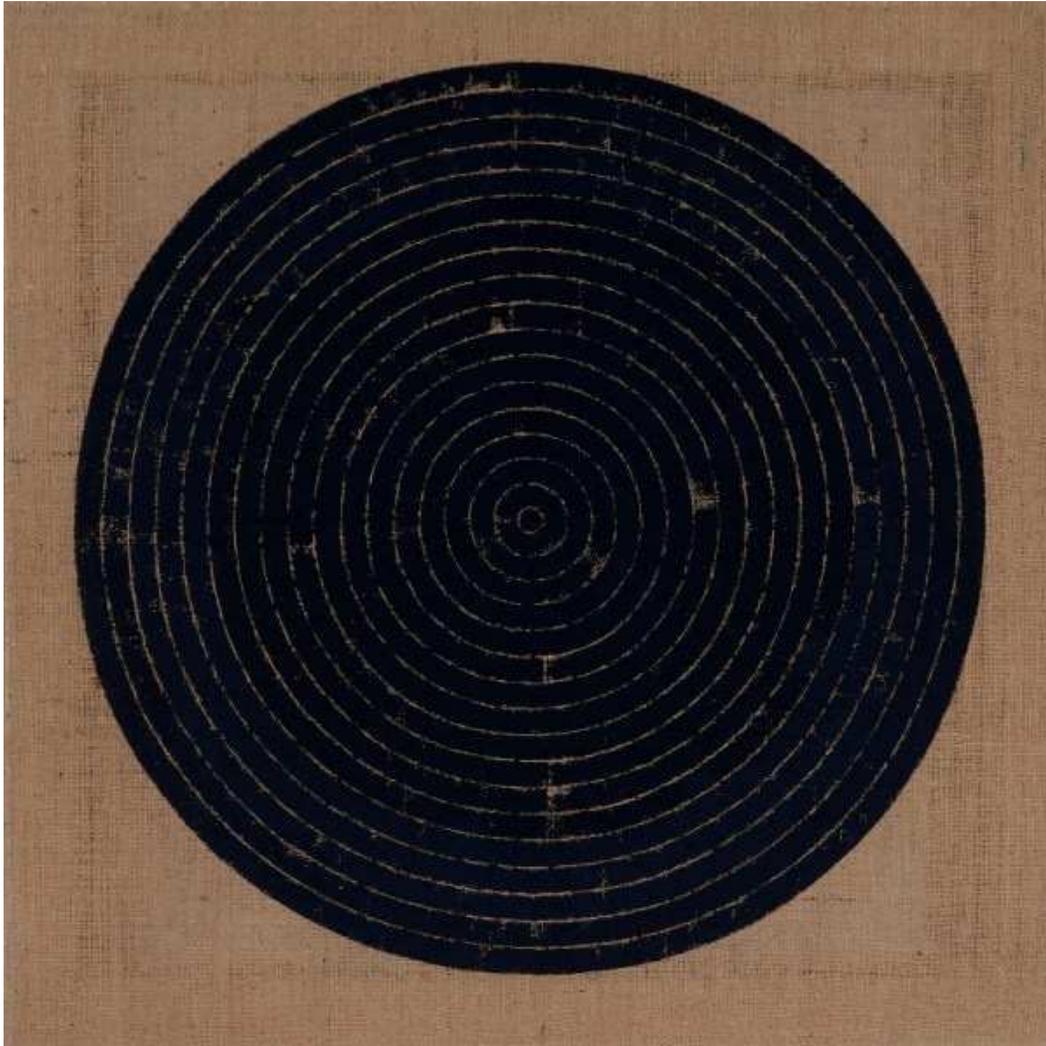
No, it was not Bosch the forerunner of abstraction. Nothing further from my statement, which I admit is partial (for I have cut the image according to my own needs), but justified. I mention the image because the Flemish master could have represented the celestial passing tunnel in a single constant gradation stripe. However, he preferred, very astutely, to increase the feeling of depth through a perspective acceleration effect that is produced, first and foremost, by shifting the center to the left (which adds movement and tension to that inner space), but also by segmenting the strange corridor in tubular sections whose joints are plainly visible and providing each of the sections with a higher degree of luminosity as it advances towards the hypothetical open, blinding space of Paradise. The very powerful, I would say even, terrifying illusion of depth, is accomplished through the gradation of shapes and tones clustered in separate stripes and not only through geometric tracing. It is a resource similar to that used much later by Eric Dever in *LUC XIII*, and more could be said regarding the similarity I have tried to suggest with Malevich's *Black circle*. Obviously, in the field of aesthetics, there are many orbits and movements too close to unite two points which are so distant, but it is necessary to understand that the rigor of the same, or at least a very similar visual construction, governs both pieces and that the change does not represent either an evolution or an involution, but perhaps a reduction, an approximation to an elemental and very powerful resource.



LUC XVI, Eric Dever, 2010

Basic shapes, proportion and tone gradation are the only elements used by Dever. It is a minimal assumption, which as well managed as it is in this occasion, has a magnetic effect on the observer, an effect that not only comes from a rigorous formal planning, but also from the patience and the work of a craftsman. I mention this because, currently, there are an endless number of digital tools that would allow one to achieve very similar designs with a higher degree of sharpness and perfection.

For example, **Manuel Barbadillo** used during the 60's, huge computers to obtain works similar to abstraction and Op Art. But it is obvious that Dever's task is not about perfection but about rigor, which is a category more related to painting. The seeming sharpness of the shapes on these canvases is counteracted by the numerous manifestations of the hand that patiently made them appear. We can see the brushstrokes, the little deviations, the inevitable vibration or the randomness of a diligent, rigorous brush which not necessarily produce perfectly closed surfaces. And there is another element, even more important, that does not come from a rigid structural design either, but from skilled use of the palette, of the mixture of colors. Dever has sought light in these pieces, he has played with it, and I do not mean only the tone graduations, which interrelationship may produce certain irradiation or concentration effects, but the morbidity of the painting, the transparency and opacity of the matter applied in relation to the support.



LUC IV, Eric Dever, 2010

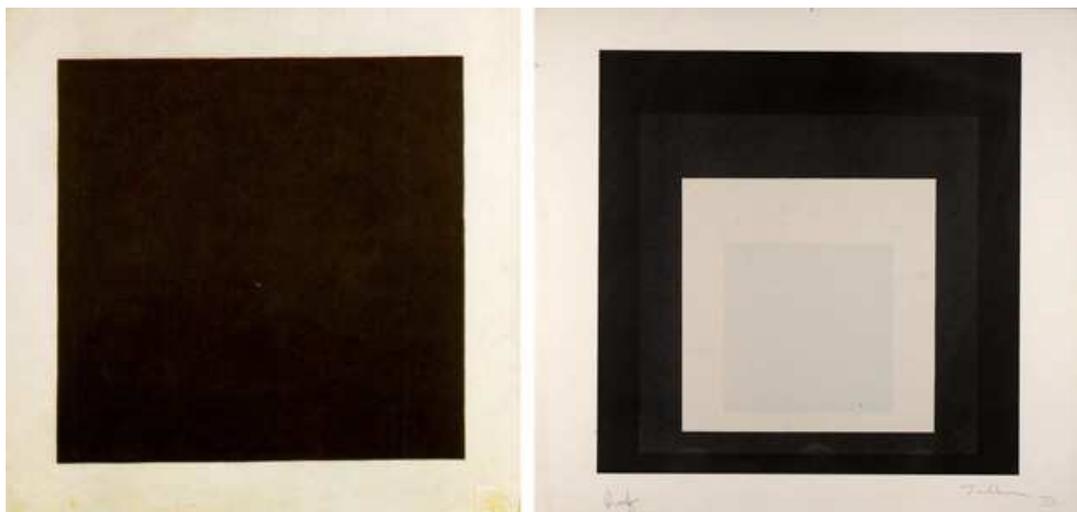
The term *morbidity* can usually be applied to incarnations in figurative painting, or even to the textual quality of certain sculptures, but not so much to pictorial abstraction. In the *LUC* paintings, Dever has used titanium or zinc white and bone or ivory black, and perhaps the attention paid to the materials themselves has been inherited, for example, from the countless essays on white color written by **Robert Ryman** (1930). But getting a painted surface to irradiate light, in an optically illusory way, is an old aspiration usually tinged with some mysticism, a large experience in which the manipulation of color is necessary. Surely neither Ryman or Dever ignore that was **Mark Rothko's** (1903-1970) aspiration, who was obsessed with the possibility of making the color fields irradiate light, superimposing large and differing veils destined to give way to a white color coating located deep in the canvas, agglutinating the pigments with a binder as obsolete as yolk, a material that,

in the long run, proved its instability in terms of preservation. The difference between them is that Rothko sought light in color and Dever has dramatically reduced the chromatic range to the point of proposing an almost absolute monochrome, although his sumptuousness and morbidity in tone gradation are obvious. So dramatic is the color reduction that some canvases seem to be a monochromatic version of some reference pieces from the European avant-garde of the early 20th century.

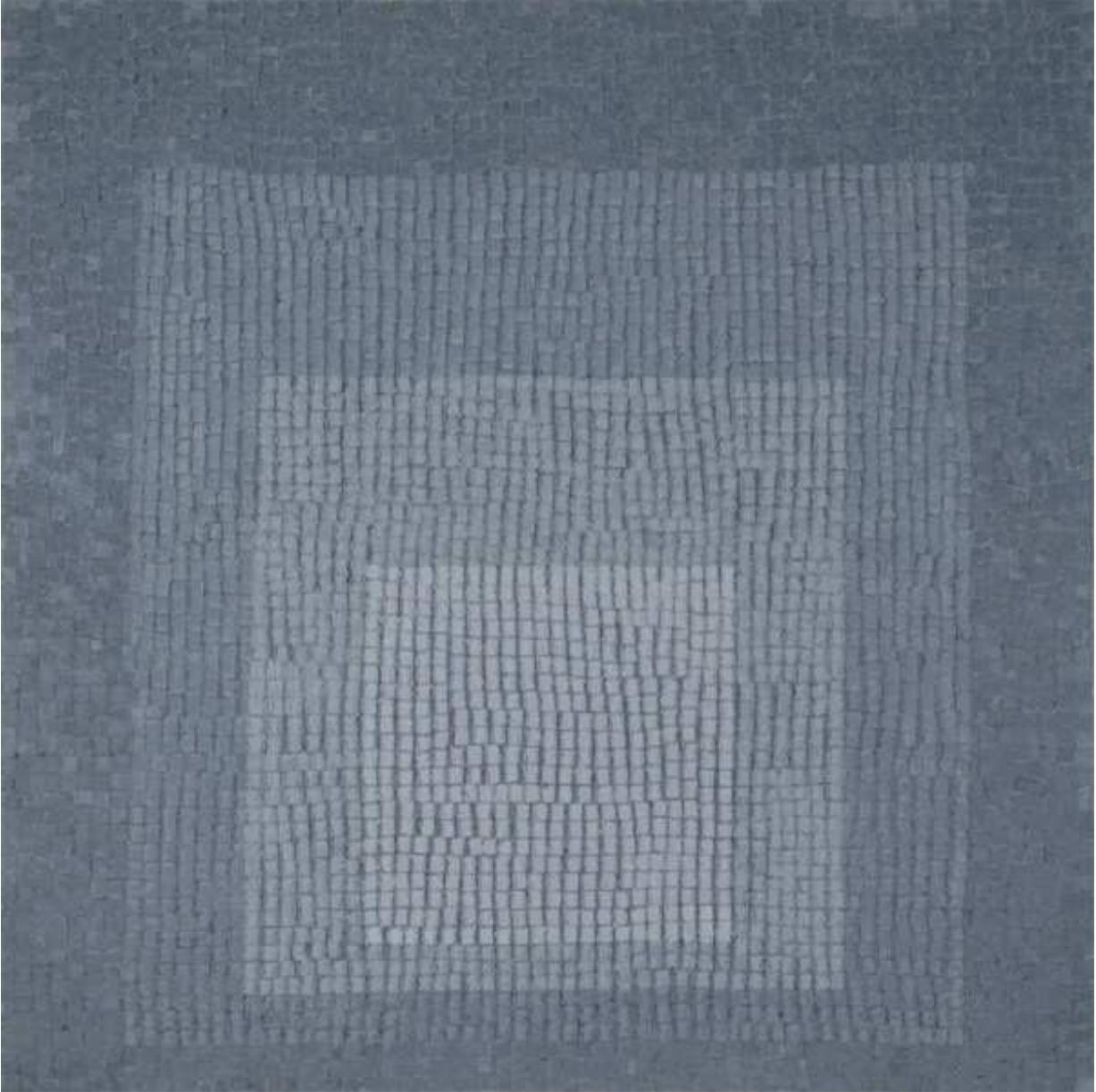


Premier Disque, Robert Delaunay, 1913; *LUC XX*, Eric Dever, 2010

Let us observe that most of Dever's circles are completely symmetrical to the center, as opposed to those other clearly off-centered by Bosch and Malevich. It seems as if he feared the dynamism caused by that slight shift of the center could disrupt the energy that, on the contrary, an absolute symmetry tends to concentrate. Most of all, it catches my eye because when he deals with quadrangular shapes he disregards that symmetry to fit to a compositional pattern more dynamic and also very recognizable, that used by **Josef Albers** (1888-1976) in his very long series of works related to the square, a model repeated in countless chromatic combinations that constituted only a simple but powerful variation of Malevich's famous black square. On his part, Dever has used only cold tones for his squares, and he has divided the color stripes into a grid that is similar to the group of tiles in a mosaic.

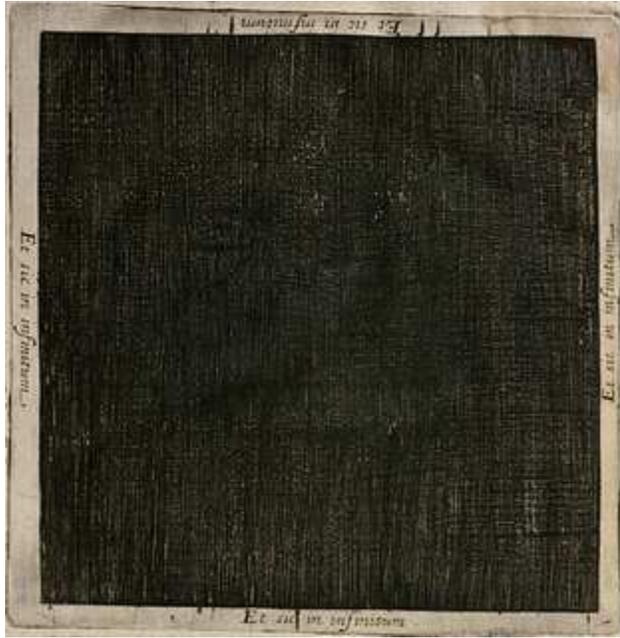


Black Square, Kasimir Malevich, 1915; *Day and Night VIII*, Josef Albers, 1963

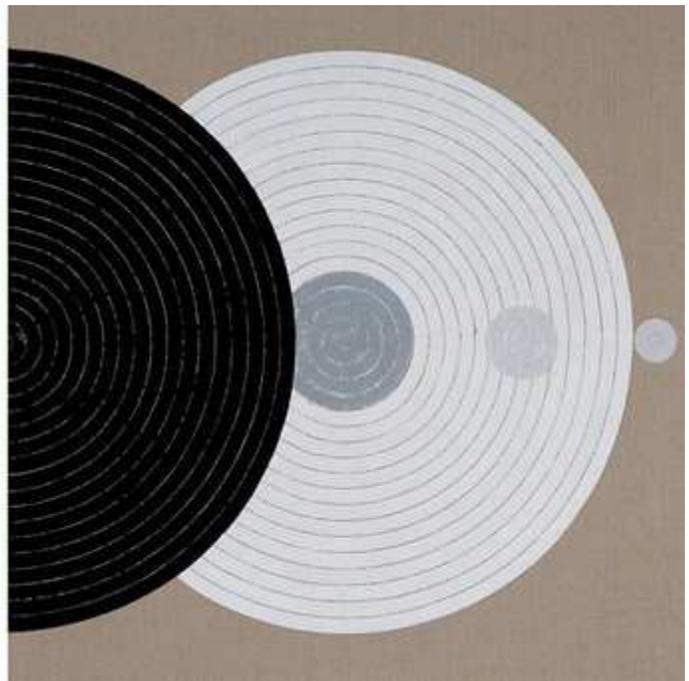
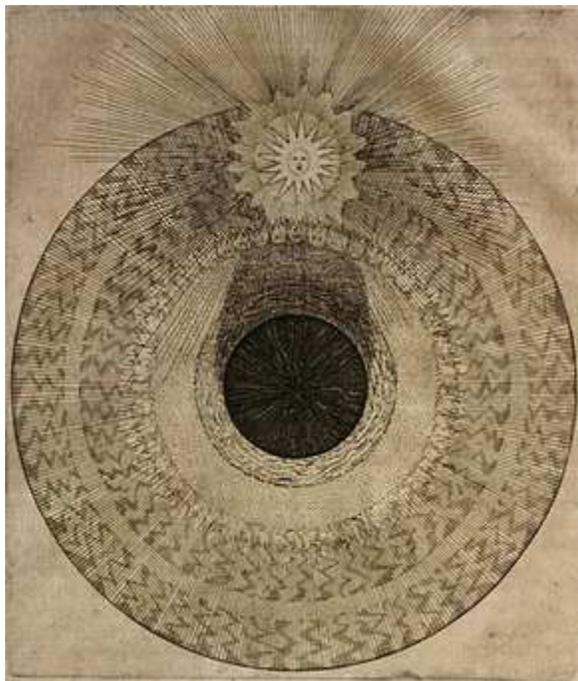


IBTW no. 5, Eric Dever, 2010

The radical composition economy and the essentiality of the lighting component open the possibility of establishing analogies. It does not seem likely that Dever could have influenced the warm backdrop that for years was the background for the Warner Bros' Looney Tunes opening credits (although the resource is, no doubt, similar and belongs by its own right to the visual heritage of North American culture), but is there any relation among the famous black square conceived by the hermetic philosopher and Kabalist **Robert Fludd** (1574-1637) to illuminate the infinite blackness prior to Creation in his essay *Utriusque Cosmi, Maioris scilicet et Minoris, metaphysica, physica, ataque technica Historia* (1617-1621) and Malevich's *Black Square* and Dever's completely covered in black canvas (where only a negligible tone variation allows us to sense the already recognizable pattern of concentric circles in the interior)?



Et sic in infinitum, the first of the pictures that illustrate Creation in *Utriusque Cosmi, Maioris...* (1617-1621), by Robert Fludd;
LUC XII, Eric Dever, 2010



One of the last pictures of the series that illustrate Creation in *Utriusque Cosmi, Maioris...* (1617-1621), by Robert Fludd;
LUC XXII, Eric Dever, 2010

In *Alchemy and Mysticism: the Hermetic Museum* (Taschen, 1997), Alexander Roob explains that to Robert Fludd

the divine act of creation is plastically represented as an alchemic process in which God, as a spagyric or metals purifier, gets the Prima Materia, the three primary, divine elements, which are light, darkness and spiritual water, from gloomy chaos.

The similarity, in general terms, with Robert Fludd's illustrations is eye-catching, but nobody would give way to solving these pieces by Dever as a mere exercise of parallel illustration or revision of a few parascientific notions. I, least of all. Nobody can be deceived because the radical nature of Dever's proposal also has an overwhelming sincerity: "*Painting itself is the subject of my work*"; however, this categorical statement only stresses a beautiful correlation between that alchemic notion of *ex nihilo* Creation and the manual and material task -dirty, exhausting and impure but no less fascinating because of that -of the painter who, as a demiurge of his own circumstance and the conditions he sets for himself, reduces his palette until polarizing it in the black (*darkness*) and the white (*light*), with which, with a primordial compositional scheme, tries its variations, its attempts, its games, its worlds. They are images that demand a type of observer free from the dominion of figuration and that of the narrative and prone, on the contrary, to the persuasion only painting -in a state of complete bareness- can exercise through its own means. The way the pigment has been carefully applied, through a repetitive and always different process, turns each work, just like the verse of the Koran repeated and varied to exhaustion by the Sufi singer into an almost ritual, almost transcendent image, which is no doubt self sufficient (just like every work of art must be to constitute itself as such). Against what could be expected, Dever's extremely rational and ordered method causes an effect that, although operating under the terms of a spacial illusion which brings him closer to Optic Art, also appeals to its materiality, thus acting with an increased power of seduction.



LUCI, Eric Dever, 2010