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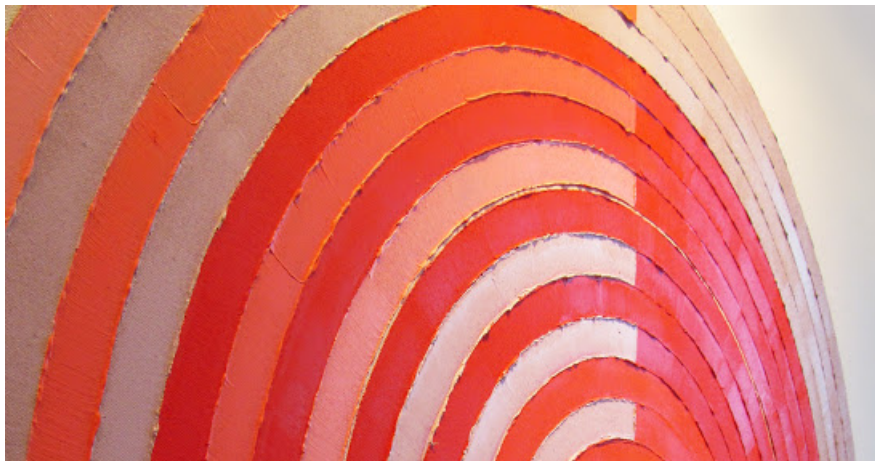
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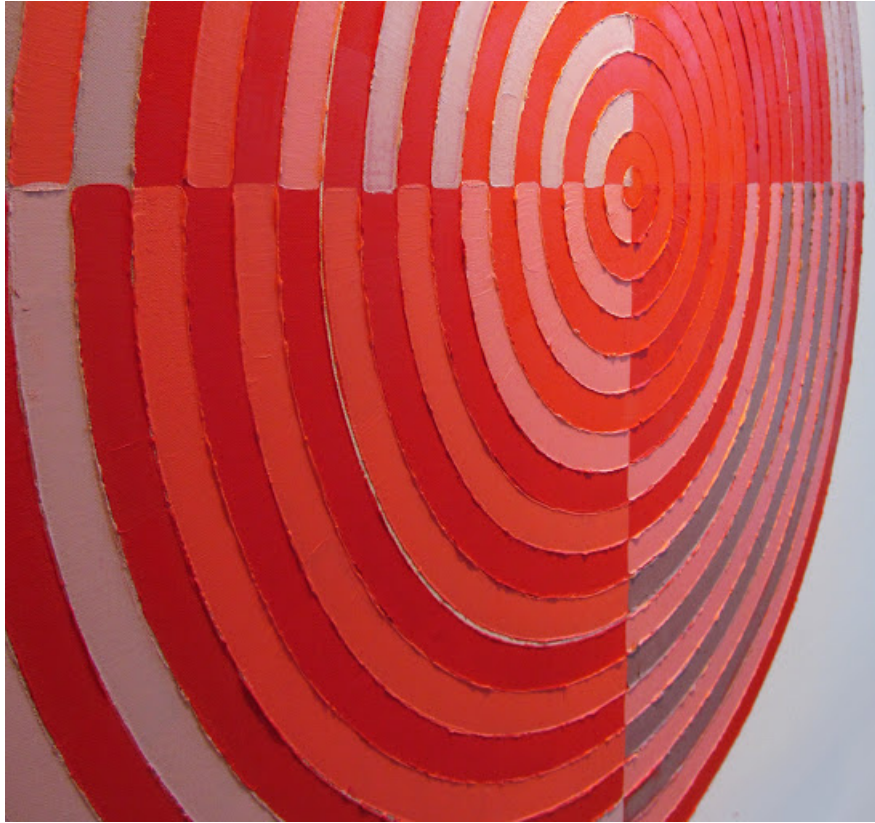
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Sunday, November 11, 2012

ex nihilo: red black and white

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detail: *NSIBTW-22*, 2012, oil on canvas 36 x 36 inches

Eric Dever

s.Ram

RED WHITE AND BLACK PAINTINGS

at Sara Nightingale

After a lengthy exile from the maddening seductions of color, the artist **Eric Dever** spent the past year rediscovering the color red. Not just any red, but the very particular iteration **Napthol Scarlet**, and the uncountable derivations possible in it when combined with white (Titanium) and black (Ivory). The results, a suite of pulsing, contemplative, hypnotic paintings by Dever are on view at **Sara Nightingale Gallery** through November 21. This is an electrifying show that you won't want to miss.

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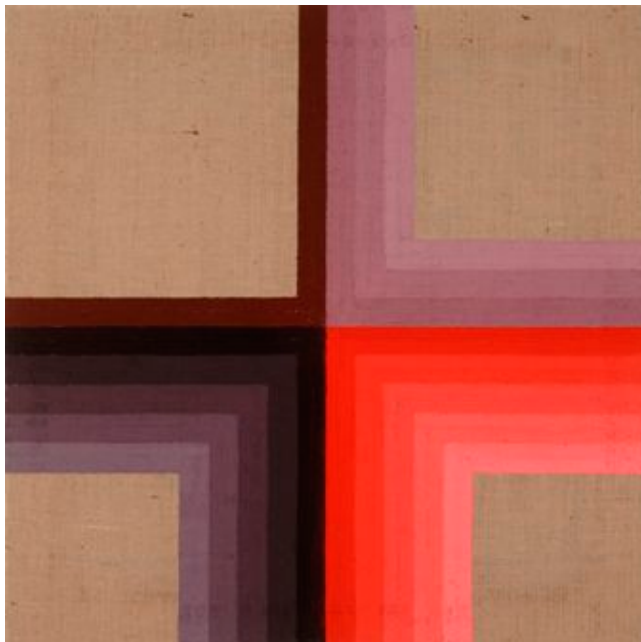


installation: S. Ram RED WHITE AND BLACK PAINTINGS, 2012

Elemental and exacting, Dever's paintings make you feel like he invented color. Crisp blacks fold into gray and white, and reds yield to coral, salmon and fleshy pinks that seem to have risen from coal fields. Brilliant blushes radiate out of expanses of burlap, linen or cotton canvas with geometric precision. His palette, modulated variations in red, black and white, reveals incredible diversity, and his arsenal of structural idioms -- chiefly circles, right angles and bars of color -- expand outward as if in a constant state of reinvention.

We sat down at the gallery recently to share some thoughts on color theory, red wine, yoga and a dash of French semiotics, courtesy Roland Barthes:

"Last year I exhibited a suite of grayscale paintings in Paris, finalizing five years of work with black and white paint exclusively."



After the Paris show, Dever traveled to Languedoc in the south of France, the place of his ancestry.

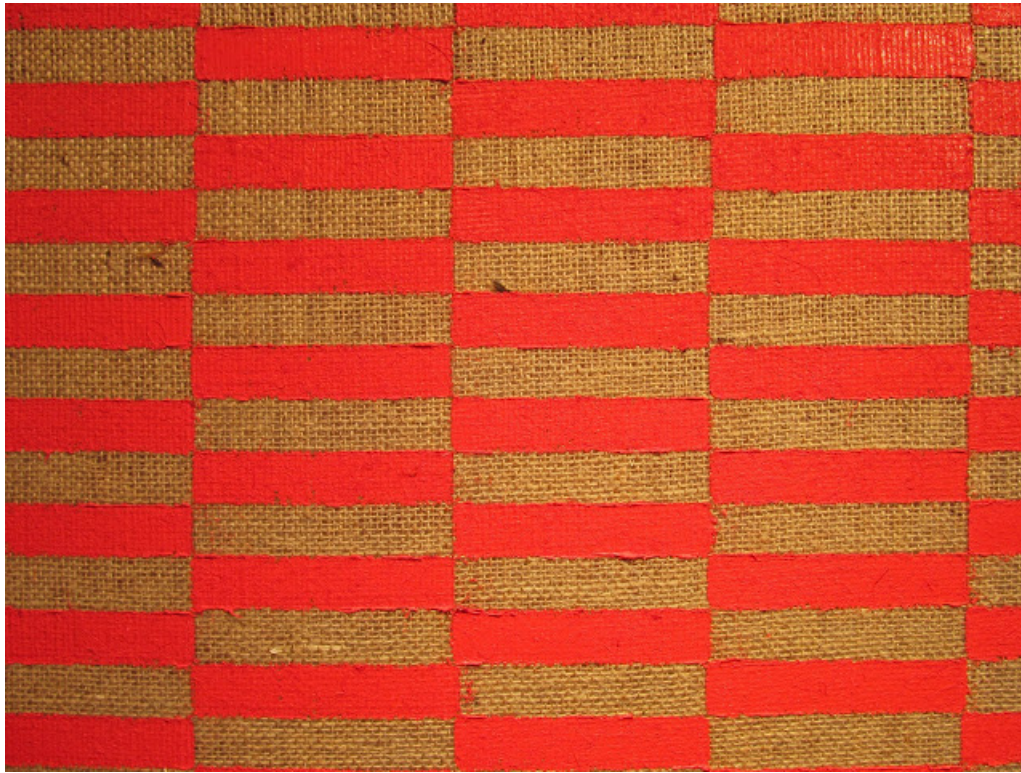
The area, known for its savage past, was an outpost of the Cathars, a resolute religious sect that dared to defy the Catholic church to their own considerable peril.

The medieval bloodshed that haunts the region brought Roland Barthes' famed *Wine and Milk* essay to Dever's mind, and a body of new work was born.

Alchemy, transmutation, wine and blood -- an "aha" moment for the artist. Barthes' commentary on the heredity of the color red and its permutations, both cultural and ideological, provided a powerful gateway for Dever.

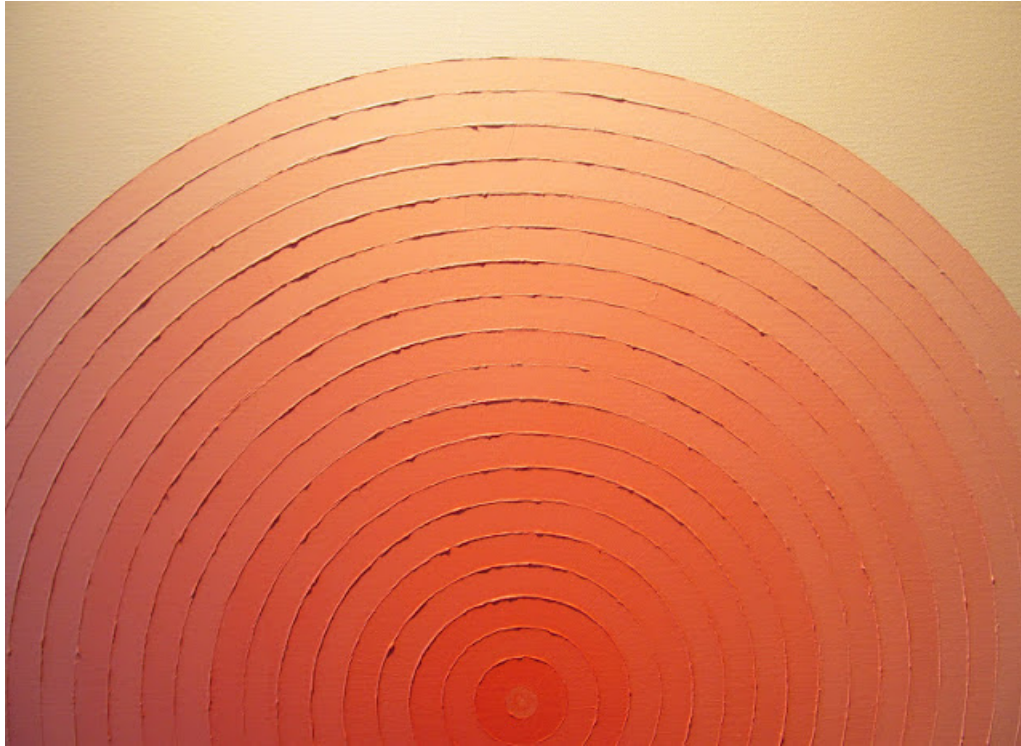
NSIBTW-9, 2012, oil on burlap, 26 x 36 inch

"It was time to
introduce a color into
my practice."



detail

Dever works methodically, applying paint with a spackle knife. Modulating the range of color gradually, he moves in or out of the canvas employing a motif that's clean and straightforward. Concentric circles, rectangles, parallel lines -- each painting is self-possessed, without a trace of the mechanical.



NSTW-9, 2012, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches

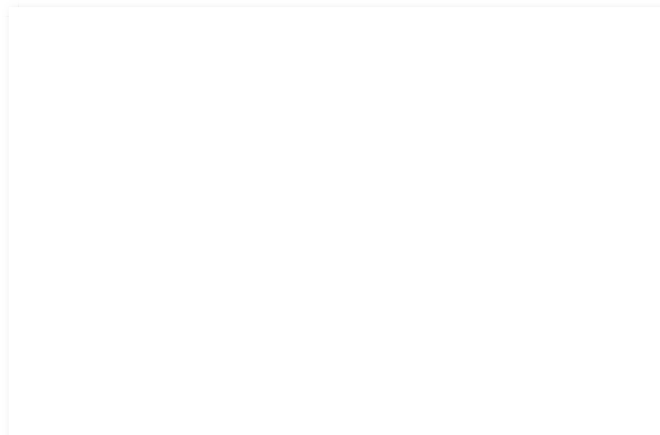
"I'm interested in the performance of color. I'd like to understand what the range is there, so I want take it as far as possible."

After exhaustive studio research, Dever selected *Napthol Scarlet* as his color of choice. Of all the red family, this one is closest to the color Vermilion, a 9th century alchemical mixture of sulfur and mercury. While it might have been an attempt to produce the philosopher's stone, it was surely a bright, opaque red that was used by painters for centuries.

"Napthol Scarlet provided the broadest range of tints, shades and tones -- but I was really surprised by the deep purples, gray lavender hues and ethereal pinks."

In an effort to disrupt the circle he began to leave portions of it blank, and it opened a compositional doorway that has allowed the artist to move through his paintings with greater confidence.

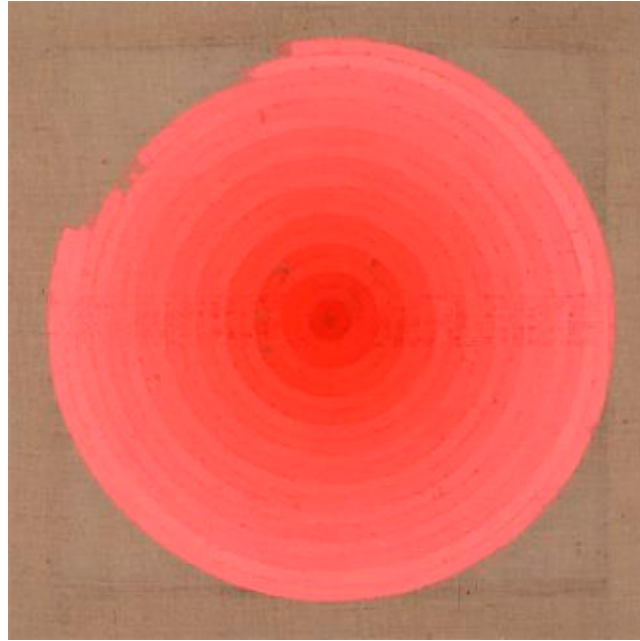
Of his antecedents -- artists employing a limited palette -- the list is long. Dever might best be allied to Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, early Brice Marden and, to some extent, Giorgio Morandi. His work is all



his own, but like Martin, the content of his art reflects an abiding interest in Eastern mysticism.

A yoga devotee, Dever's art runs parallel to his yogic practice which includes the study of Sanskrit and chant. His examinations of color and form dovetail pretty seamlessly into the artist's apprehension of material nature as described in Samkyha philosophy.

"When I paint, I have a sense of mixing the three gunas (energies): *tamas*, (or black, darkness, matter); *satva*, (or white, light and the ether sphere); and *rajas*, (red, the energy that binds these qualities and all of existence).



NSTW-6, 2012, oil on burlap, 36 x 36 inches

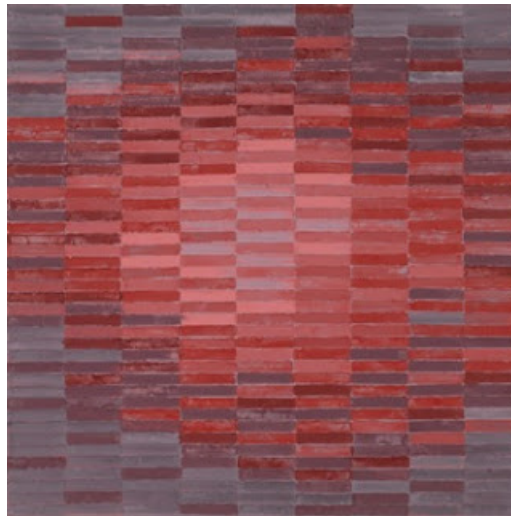
Like breaking a long fast, the sudden apprehension of color was exhilarating for Dever.

"I've never enjoyed painting anything so much. It's been over a year now, and I still feel that way. Moving out of the grayscale - the possibilities are exponentially larger and more complex."

Monastic at one end and exuberant at the other, embedded in Dever's visual language is a portrait of that glorious optic brain. The rudiments of vision -- here, a sort of subculture all its own -- offer a full spectrum of pictorial restraint, painterly finesse and deep breathing.

Hmmm...black and white...

"For Picasso, black and white are



NSIBTW-17, 2012, oil on burlap, 36 x 36 inches



NSIBTW-10, 2012, oil on burlap, 36 x 36 inches

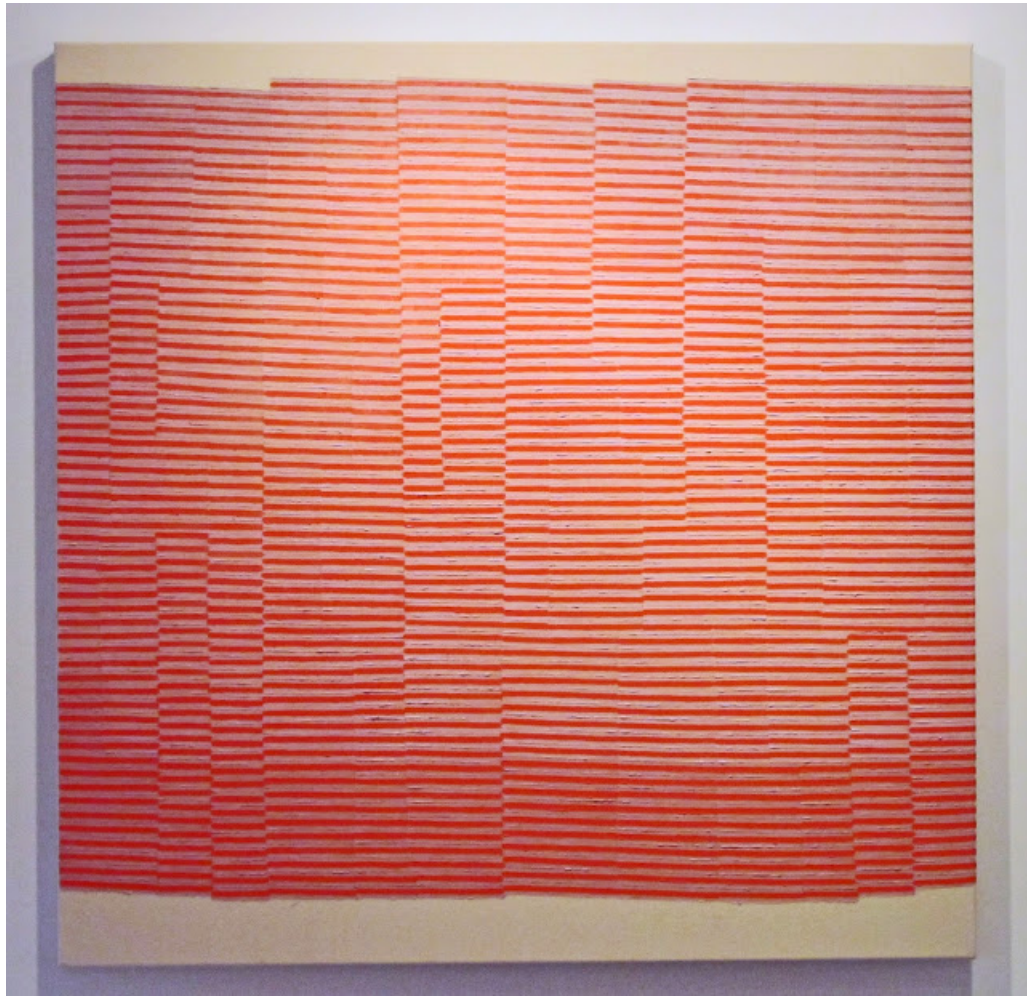
*colors, and so are the
thousands of shades of gray in between."*

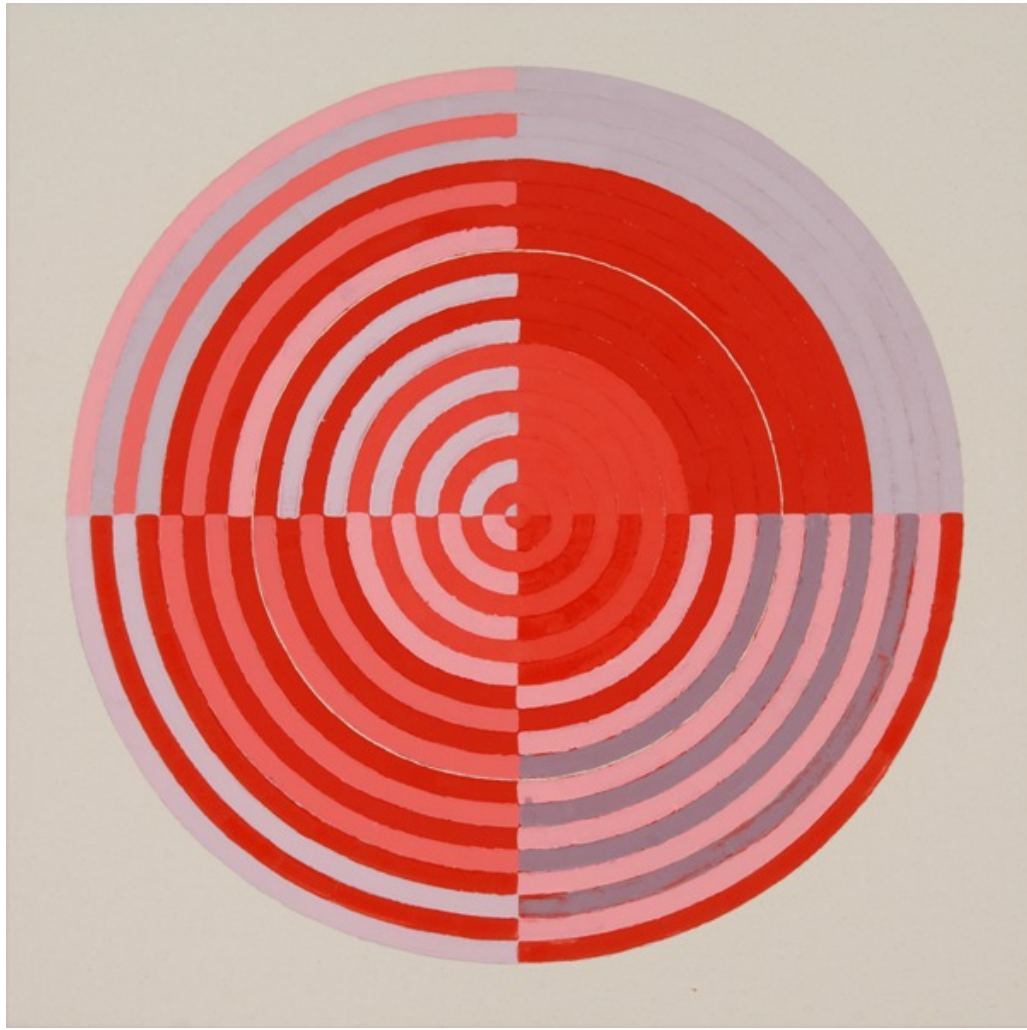
Jerry Saltz, *Picasso's Monochrome Paintings Display a Rainbow of Emotion*

New York Magazine, November 5, 2012



portrait of the artist





Posted by Blinnk at 2:20 PM



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2 comments:

Joe Pintauro said...

It's nice to run across a studious critic who can articulate Eric Dever's extraordinary M.O. I've liked the canvasses especially that reflected his years long study of black and white, his pure attraction to paint itself and the effects of light upon paint which come through in myriad, variations in his paintings. Now by adding color, just one specific red, his headed on a path few painters have dared to take except those mentioned and also Josef Albers who brought to paint and color a similarly playful yet intensely spiritual artful purpose. Kudos to the painter and the critic.

November 11, 2012 at 5:53 PM

Florent Nedelec said...

Beautiful work!

November 12, 2012 at 4:01 PM

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