

ERIC DEVER (b. 1962)

Eric Dever: To Look at Things in Bloom
Gail Levin, Ph.D.

Eric Dever's latest paintings stem from his enthusiastic embrace of nature. He entralls us with some of his favorite flowers, from Bird of Paradise to roses—as well as by his landscapes—both representational and imagined. Titles like *Orient*, *Central Coast*, *Highway 1*, and *Monterey*, merely hint at some of his peregrinations and their legacy.

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. For a long while, he limited himself to working entirely in monochrome, only gradually evolving from all white, to white and black, to adding one variety of red: Naphthol Scarlet. At the time, Dever was deep into the exploration of material nature, inspired by Yoga and Indian philosophy, especially Samkhya, which teaches that everything in reality is derived from the self, the soul, or the intellect, as well as from creative agency or energy.

Not surprisingly, Dever's new pictures do not seek to replicate nature, but instead vibrate between representation and abstraction, a kind of rhythmic dance expressing both what he later recalls in his mind's eye and, simultaneously, how exhilarated he feels while he loses himself in nature. He relies upon self-discipline or self-study, some of which he has absorbed from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

Yet Dever's very personal observations of nature reflect in part his own journey from Los Angeles, where he was born in 1962, and grew up, to New York City, where he received his Master of Arts degree in painting at New York University in 1988. After years of painting while employed part time in the city in the prestigious architectural firm of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, Dever moved in 2002 even further east—to Southampton, New York, on the East End of Long Island. To say that Dever's vision of nature has its roots on the West Coast, while he is now fully engaged on the East Coast, only begins to come to terms with the particularity of his observations.

Dever doesn't paint nature, he paints his experience of it. His personal expression calls to mind an earlier painter who also migrated from Los Angeles to New York City to study painting, then moved out to the Hamptons on Long Island's East End: Jackson Pollock, who famously responded to Hans Hofmann's question, "Do you work from nature?" by proclaiming: "I am nature." As it did for Pollock, the natural landscape on Long Island offers Dever both stimulation and direction that has found its way into his paintings.

In Dever's Southampton studio, set in the picturesque garden that he himself designed, I looked at the gorgeous diptych *Lily of the Nile* (also called *Agapanthus* and featured in another of the new works), and I found myself recalling the garden of Claude Monet (1840-1926), in Giverny, France, which inspired the late paintings of waterlilies that famously disregarded boundaries

and moved toward abstraction. Critics have long since linked Monet's late "all-over painting" to Pollock's abstractions. Now Dever's over-sized depiction of the lavender blue agapanthus, this time extending over two large canvases, continues in this gestural tradition.

Dever's purposeful use of the raw linen surface in *Lily of the Nile* in fact links to Abstract Expressionism's influence. As a young painter in New York, Dever learned indirectly from Milton Resnick (1917-2004), whose advice to his students was to use the raw surface of his pictures as a compositional element. Dever recalls reading a 2011 *Art News* article by David Reed that quoted Resnick's adamant instruction to students: "You have to break through the surface." The flowers in Dever's new paintings range from exotic subtropicals like agapanthus, amaryllis, or calla lily to locally hardy favorites like roses, dogwood, and lilac. He hasn't let go of his hometown memories, where he recalls subtropical Bird of Paradise flowers thriving on urban traffic islands or agapanthus and calla lilies growing along driveways. The mild, dry, Mediterranean-like climate of Los Angeles contrasts with the colder, wet climate of Eastern Long Island. Dever explained, "What is common in Los Angeles becomes precious in the Northeast."

But Eastern Long Island also projects a legacy of modernist painting, from which Dever, the 2022 artist resident at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, has absorbed lessons that he uses to create his own style of painting. For example, Max Ernst, who like many Surrealists fled to the United States during World War II (and worked briefly on Long Island in 1944), invented in 1920s Germany a technique that he called *grattage*, in which paint is scraped across canvas to reveal the imprints of the objects placed beneath. Dever utilizes a similar process of scraping paint in works like *Tipping Point*, referring to a fleeting image of the towering pale blooms of a plant called yucca that grows on both coasts. He also adapted from Ernst the technique of pressing paint from one surface onto another, known as *decalcomania*.

Dever used *decalcomania* in his painting, *Myself as a Rose*, which he picked as the flower with which he "self-identifies," a kind of Duchampian theme of disguise or alter-ego. The blossom in question is colored a bright coral-orange, the prize progeny of his own garden. From the microcosm of nature at home to the macrocosm of the larger landscape, Dever finds meaning and stimulation in his visual field. Recipient of a 2020 Warhol Foundation/Nature Conservancy-Montauk Project Artist residency, Dever painted at the easternmost tip of Long Island, responding directly to the blue summer hues of twilight that the French call *l'heure bleue*. This vision is especially evident in works like *Lavender Memory*, where light and energy work to communicate a sense of awe reflecting the time of day and the passing of seasons. "To Look at Things in Bloom," the name Dever has chosen for this body of work, is adapted from a line of verse from the *Loveliest of Trees* by the English classical scholar and poet, A. E. Housman (1859-1936). This choice places Dever in sympathy with artists and poets of the modernist era, whose work still has much to teach us.

-Gail Levin, Distinguished Professor at Baruch College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, has written extensively on Abstract Expressionism and other aspects of American modern art. She is the author of Lee Krasner: A Biography and other books.

Eric Dever's 2020 solo exhibition, *A Thousand Nows*, was curated by Margery Gosnell-Qua for the Suffolk County Community College, 2020. As part of the programming, Helen Harrison, Director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, interviewed Dever about the show. Additional solo exhibitions include Berry Campbell, New York, 2019 (*Painting in a House Made of Air*); Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, 2017; New York University, Kimmel Galleries, New York, 2015-2016; Molloy College, Rockville Centre, New York, 2014; and Berry Campbell, New York, 2014. 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. Dever had two paintings on loan to the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macau, Art in Embassies, Department of State exhibition, 2016-2019. These paintings were featured in a lecture by Gail Levin, Distinguished Professor of Art History, Baruch College and the CUNY Graduate Center American Art, at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, New York, 2016.

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; 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-deBélengard, France; City National Plaza, Los Angeles, California; 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; ParisCONCRET, France; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; Sag Harbor Whaling and Historical Museum, Sag Harbor, New York; Spaces, Cleveland, Ohio; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Eric Dever's public collections include the Centre d'Art et de Culture, Château d'Escueillens, Saint-Just de 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; Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York; New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, Fish Bridge 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.

CV

b. 1962, Los Angeles, California

1980, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, California

1984, Bachelor of Arts, California Lutheran College, Thousand Oaks, California

1988, Master of Arts, New York University

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, New York, *Eric Dever*, 1989.

Cloître des Billettes, Paris, *Moments Ephémères*, 1991.

Hudson River Museum, Hastings on the Hudson, New York, *Meditations*, 1991.

ARC Gallery, Chicago, *La Comédie Humaine*, 1994.

Coleman Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1995.

Nicholas Davies Gallery, New York, *Le Désert de Retz et Parc Monceau*, 1997.

Everything is Everything, Brooklyn, *4 Funerals and 2 Follies*, 1998.

Centre d'Art et de Rencontres, Château d'Escueillens, Saint-Just en Bellengard, France, *Diamonds and Rust*, 2004.

White Room, Soho House, New York, *East End Paintings*, 2004.

Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, *Perennial Histories*, 2005.

Sara Nightingale Gallery, Shelter Island, New York, *White Paintings 2007-9*, 2009.

Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, *Black as White*, 2011.

Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, *Red White and Black Paintings*, 2012.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Eric Dever*, 2014.

Frank and Gertrude Kaiser Art Gallery, Molloy College, *The Rose Chapel*, 2014.

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

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, *Light, Energy and Matter*, 2017.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Painting in a House Made of Air*, 2019.

Suffolk County Community College, Hempstead, New York, *Eric Dever: A Thousand Nows*, 2020.

Berry Campbell, New York, *To Look at Things in Bloom*, 2022.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Art Rental and Sales Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 1980.

ARCO, Los Angeles, California, *Future Masters Art Exhibition and Scholarship Program*, 1980.

Conejo Valley Art Museum, Thousand Oaks, California, 1984.

PS 122, New York, *Out of Landscape*, 1990.

Art in General, New York, *Salon Show*, (curated by Holly Block), 1992.

Renée Fotouhi Gallery East, East Hampton, New York, 1992.

Catskill Gallery, Catskill, New York, *View from Olana: A Survey of Contemporary Landscape Art*, 1993.

Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, *Scene and Unscene*, 1993.

Renée Fotouhi Gallery East, East Hampton, New York, 1993.

Spaces, Cleveland, Ohio, *History Painting*, 1993.

Coleman Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1994.

ACME Art Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1995.

Renée Fotouhi Gallery East, East Hampton, New York, 1995.
Coleman Gallery, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1996.
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Sculpture Center, New York, 1999.
The Buddy Holly Center, Lubbock, Texas, *Y2-Klay*, 2000.
Gallery 402, New York, 2001.
Elaine Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York, 2002.
Gallery 402, New York, 2003.
Mark Borghi Fine Art, Bridgehampton, New York, 2004.
Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, 2004.
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Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, 2006.
Amy Simon Fine Art, Westport, Connecticut, 2007.
Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, Michigan, *Sleight of Hand*, 2007.
Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, 2008.
Ken Jones Jr. Fine Art, Easton, Pennsylvania, *How Does Your Garden Grow*, 2009.
Kuhn Fine Arts Gallery, Ohio State University, Marion, *Something About Nothing*, 2009.
Sara Nightingale Gallery, Shelter Island, New York, 2009.
Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York, *Biennial*, 2010.
Sara Nightingale Gallery, Shelter Island, New York, 2010.
ParisCONCRET, Paris, *Doucement*, 2011.
Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York, *The Big Show*, 2011.
The Painting Center, New York, *Grey Matter*, 2011.
Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, 2012.
Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York, 2012.
ParisCONCRET, Paris, *Poste Concret*, 2013.
Sag Harbor Whaling and Historical Museum, New York, *A Whale of a Show*, 2013.
Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, New York, *Meditation Room*, 2013.
Sag Harbor Whaling and Historical Museum, New York, *A Whale of a Show*, 2014.
Islip Art Museum, East Islip, New York, *Redacted: Connecting Dots Through a Shifting Field* (curated by Janet Goleas), 2014.
Ille Art, Amagansett, New York, 2014.
Art Silicon Valley/San Francisco, California, Berry Campbell, 2014.
Art Wynwood, Miami, Florida, Berry Campbell, 2014.
Guild Hall, Member's Show, East Hampton, New York, 2015.
Berry Campbell, Summer Selections, New York 2015.
Art Miami, Miami, Florida, Berry Campbell, 2015.
Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, Arkansas, The 47th Collectors Show, 2015.
Art Silicon Valley/San Francisco, California, Berry Campbell, 2015.
Wood Gallery, Arizona State University, Tempe, *Somewhere Between Black & White*, 2015.
Silas Marder Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York, 2015.
Ille Art, Amagansett, New York, 2016.
Art Southampton, Southampton, New York, Berry Campbell, 2016.
Art Wynwood, Miami, Florida, Berry Campbell, 2016.

Klaus Center for the Arts, Marymount University of California-Arts and Media, San Pedro, California, *The Art of Change*, 2016.
Art Southampton, Southampton, New York, Berry Campbell, 2016
Art in Embassies, United States Consulate, Hong Kong and Macau, 2016-19.
Berry Campbell, New York, Summer Selections, 2017.
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, *Parrish Perspectives: New Works in Context*, 2017.
Occupy Museums, Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Debtfair*, 2017.
Southampton Art Center, Southampton, New York, *East End Collected 3* (curated by Paton Miller), 2017.
Crush Curatorial, Amagansett, New York, *Alt-Egos* (curated by Scott Bluedorn), 2017.
Palm Beach Modern and Contemporary, Palm Beach, Florida, 2018.
Berry Campbell, New York, Summer Selections, 2018.
Palm Beach Modern and Contemporary, Palm Beach, Florida, 2019
Berry Campbell, New York, Summer Selections, 2019.
Site: Brooklyn Gallery, New York, *Geometry*, 2019 (curated by Phyllis Tuchman).
Site: Brooklyn Gallery, New York, *Monochrome*, 2019 (curated by Donna Harkavy).
Ezra Gallery, Center for Jewish Life, Sag Harbor, New York, 2019 (curated by Kimberley Goff).
Drive-by-Art, Public Art in the Moment of Social Distancing, 2020, Long Island, New York (organized by Warren Neidich)
Site: Brooklyn Gallery, New York, *Abstraction*, 2020 (curated by Gail Levin)
Berry Campbell, New York, *Artist Insights/ Contemporary Highlights*, 2020.
Ashawagh Hall, East Hampton, New York, *Continuum*, 2020. (organized by Berry Campbell)
open air studio space time, (Re)collecting an Artist's Dream, Shinnecock Hills, Southampton, New York, 2020
Site: Brooklyn, Brooklyn, New York, *Shape in All Its Forms*, 2021 (curated) by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp)
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, *A Visual Conversation*, 2022 (artist resident project and student collaboration)
Ashawagh Hall, East Hampton, New York, *Community*, 2022. (Organized by Berry Campbell)
Art in Embassies and Ambassador Douglas Hickey, U.S. Ambassador to Finland exhibition at the U.S. Embassy residence in Helsinki, 2022-25.
Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York, *The Rains are Changing Fast: New Acquisitions in Context*, 2024.
Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York, *Seeing Red: From Renoir to Warhol*, 2024.
Guild Hall, East Hampton, *The 85th Members Exhibition*, 2024-2025.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Animal Rescue Fund ARF, East Hampton, New York
Bridgehampton Museum, New York
Centre d'Art et de Culture, Château d'Escueillens, Aude, France
Coca Cola Company, Atlanta, Georgia
Collection Mark Hampton
Division Street Editions and The Reutershan Educational Trust, Sag Harbor, New York

BERRY CAMPBELL

524 W 26th Street, New York, NY 10001 | 212.924.2178 | www.berrycampbell.com | info@berrycampbell.com

Francis J. Greenburger Collection, New York

Gracie Mansion, New York

Grey Art Gallery, New York University Art Collection, New York

Guild Hall, East Hampton, New York

Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York

Lady Juliet and Somerset de Chair

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, New York

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York

Sub Zero Freezer Company, Madison, Wisconsin