

RIPPED SEAMS
& OTHER DELIGHTS
WORKS BY KATE ERIC



Never Ever Even (detail), 2012
Acrylic on canvas
77 x 196 in / 196 x 498 cm



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Ripped Seams & Other Delights
Works by Kate Eric
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AN ARGUMENT FOR PAINTING

Choreographed chaos in the collaborative work of KATE ERIC

Enter a painting by artist couple Kate Eric. Its controlled splashes of intense color and battling brushwork techniques will make one feel simultaneously an observer and a part of the “action.” And action is key. For however inscrutable the event taking place, the moment depicted—in a constantly evolving, original vocabulary—is a diagram of movement. Each painting is built from an accumulation of forces in illusory universes that is central not only to its impetus but its very essence. We might start out with a form or character of some kind: a feeder or flurry or frill,” says Eric, the male half of the married pair, “Then two. This introduces a lack of balance, which in turn can become complete destabilization.” But as we observe, in the hands of Kate Eric, instability can be strikingly, unpredictably handsome.

In order to create a new work, the artists begin to explore the notion of symmetry, and then immediately set out to find a nexus of imbalance within the intricately painted world. If Eric puts down the first pigments on a raw, unprimed canvas, the painting is then given to Kate, who makes her own meaningful marks using brushes, or spatulas, squeegees, syringes. Kate comments in a painterly way on Eric’s creations, extending his lines, removing and covering bits of his forms and “correcting his mistakes.” Then it is returned to Eric, (the artists have been known to pass a single canvas back and forth dozens of times.) and more dissatisfaction ensues. Their painted forms overlap and intrude and over the course of days and weeks a kind of frustration gives rise to the inexorable painted macrocosm. What began as a conversation methodically becomes noisier, more intense. An argument in paint.

This contest of wills is, of course, immortalized in the painting itself. Each painting, large or small, depicts a present tense episode of creation and destruction. Disorder seems standard and expected, and traditional distinctions between order and chaos become moot. In a work by Kate Eric, opposing forces are acting upon each other much like a molecular schema, albeit an emotional, social, and colorful one. “Stuff is going on,” as the artists have definitively stated.

For the viewer, the experience is like being privy to a confounding, roiling incident. “We like to toy with the ability of people who are standing in front of a painting to identify what, precisely, is happening,” Kate Eric says. This effect is achieved because the compelling nature of the canvas arises not just from its color and movement, but the inescapable truth that the “stuff” is occurring in the gap between representation and abstraction. Background and foreground are in constant flux. The paintings are thickly painted in places, barely touched in others. They have no beginnings and no ends. Crowds of anemone-like forms seem to rise up in protest at the bottom of the canvas entitled *Ripped Seam on Bumblemarsh* (2012), which emits simultaneous guises of being under sea and in outer space. Diaphanous appendages of fabric appear in the unique state of expanding while frozen into place. Delicate, layered drips are choreographed to evoke otherworldly feathers—or is that a creature

tied up with string? The wonderfully disconcerting and forceful worlds continue throughout the exhibition: Did I just see a ladies’ fan go by? Was it thrown in a fit of rage or spit out? Or is it just floating haplessly by on its journey to an even more fluctuating destination? Is that someone on Seahorseback? Vegetal sex organs? A scarecrow? Pincers? Vomiting floral arrangements? Exploding blood-filled bagpipes? Absolutely. And perhaps not.

The types of aggressions and pluralities begun on the canvases continue as our perceptions of the beings and mutable locales in the paintings collide with what our brains are telling our retinas. Any two Kate Eric organisms might be in the process of colliding or it what we see could just as likely be a depiction of symbiotic massage. The effect is harrowing but exquisite...like life. As philosophers, Kate Tedman and Eric Siemens also remain intrigued by what constitutes an act of aggression and why we dub it “violent.” In molecular societies, things routinely bounce off of each other, knowing nothing else. Certainly a rockslide is violent to a rock, but it might represent the relief of a burden from the point of view of the mountain. Even a seemingly passive occurrence such as the exhalation of cigarette smoke requires lungs to squeeze and results in the infiltrated airstream becoming poisoned and piqued. Aggression, Kate Eric would argue, is ubiquitous and unavoidable and sometimes lovely. If violence is the norm, why fight it?

German painter Otto Dix, who, through a more figurative practice, explored, and arguably exorcised personal dreams and visions by addressing the uncomfortable. “Painting is the effort to produce order, order in yourself” he wrote of his work, “There is much chaos in me, much chaos in our time.” Much of the same staring-into-the-abyss bravery exists within Kate Eric’s approach to painting. But the fact that they are two different people engaged in a codependent, visceral duel of intellects and painterly chops, keeps the works from total existential despair. For the San Francisco-based team, chaos is its own kind of steady touchstone. A painting, unsettling as it may be in process and perception, is just one more thing that happens. It is no more and no less personal and meaningful as, say, dancing or dreaming or drooling, or anything in our shared universe. Kate and Eric present to the public these private landscapes that arise from conflict and undulate with the meticulous commotion that two (or more) forces inevitably generate. They clash for us, beautifully. In a way, the subject of their work is coupledness: a celebratory, examination of its inherently troubled nature, its discord and harmonies, frisson and frottage.

Doug McClellmont, *New York, October 2012*



Feeder on the Flurry, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
79 x 59 in / 201 x 150 cm



Feeder in Bloom, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
38 x 38 in / 96.5 x 96.5 cm



Frey Vs Frizzle, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
34 x 52 in / 86.4 x 132.1 cm



Kiss and the Woo Fly, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 46 in / 61 x 116.8 cm



Looming the Hive, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
32 x 58 in / 81.3 x 147.3 cm



Never Ever Even, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
77 x 196 in / 196 x 498 cm



Portrait 1, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
34 x 22 in / 86 x 179 cm



Portrait 2, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
46 x 32 in / 117 x 81 cm



Portrait 3, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
38 x 28 in / 97 x 71 cm



Portrait 4, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
38 x 28 in / 97 x 71 cm



Ridgeline and the Battle Fold, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
38 x 64 in / 97 x 163 cm



Ripped Seam on Bumblemarsh, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
47 x 70.5 in / 119 x 179 cm



Weavers 2, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
38 x 50 in / 97 x 127 cm



Welters 5, 2012
Acrylic on paper
21 x 29 in / 53.5 x 73.7 cm



Welters 1, 2012
Acrylic on paper
29 x 21 in / 73.7 x 53.5 cm



Welters 2, 2012
Acrylic on paper
29 x 21 in / 73.7 x 53.5 cm



Welters 3, 2012
Acrylic on paper
29 x 21 in / 73.7 x 53.5 cm



Welters 4, 2012
Acrylic on paper
29 x 21 in / 73.7 x 53.5 cm

Q&A

WITH KATE ERIC

It is not very common to encounter artists collaborations, especially those who jointly and simultaneously create works. Can you both elaborate on the process involved in your collaborative identity and artistic partnership? In what ways do you each make your own contribution to the work?

For many artists there is a loosely calibrated progression of failures and recoveries that, in theory, leads them past their own limitations. In our case, working with another person is that mechanism. Procedurally, it looks like two people running around trying to put out a forest fire with a wet gopher in each hand.

While our work is carefully conceived, the very nature of working with another person involves miscommunication, which inevitably leads somewhere other than towards the original concept. It is in solving the problems that come about through these miscommunications that we take our greatest pleasure (though it masquerades initially as pain and suffering). Accident is the mutation that we selectively adopt in order for our concepts to evolve into something greater than the original design.

Your work seems to often reference nature such as the underwater world, bugs, plants, etc. Do you look at images of nature for inspiration and or do you spend a lot of time in nature? Are your academic backgrounds of science and philosophy major influences?

We both had childhoods featuring oppressive cloud-cover, which lead to a nuanced understanding of mud types, ample time to develop imaginary non-muddy 'realities' (pulled from barnyard observations) and the required seclusion to allow those alternate realities to remain unchallenged. Our paintings could fairly be seen as excessive extrapolations of in-depth studies in very limited subject matter, often chicken-related.

Our academic backgrounds influence our art in the same measure that your high-school biology class influences your love-life – Sure, there's a crossover in terms of subject matter, but hopefully the latter is more memorable.

Your works also express the interaction between oppositions such as that of beauty and violence, as well as harmony and chaos. Where does this inspiration come from? Are these interactions derived within your artistic collaboration? How do you integrate these opposing forces to create one cohesive work?

Beauty and violence and harmony and chaos are, viewed from any reasonable distance, known as "Monday". These terms gain meaning through bias. For instance, to your slightly below average moon rock, the An Lushan Rebellion looked about as violent as a lava lamp (it takes a completely different view of quarries, however).

Chaos seems to be a term reserved for circumstances that we are too stupid to understand. I'm not sure we believe in it. Harmony is what those who believe in chaos call it when chaos goes their way. I'm not sure we believe in that either.

Our work presupposes a universe where forces act upon each other without objective, sentience or strategy or, as the moon rock calls it, "the Universe".

Can you talk about the future of your work? Do you plan to continue to explore these otherworldly universes or do you see yourselves going in a different direction? Do you ever plan to use different mediums?

We only have access to this universe currently, but the bits of it we include in the paintings are carefully selected from far-apart locations. It is difficult to say in which direction we are headed, but there is always a progression in terms of movements, tone and shape. We have previously worked in other media (embroidery, wood, resins...etc.) and it is certainly our intention to take our current thoughts beyond the confines of paint.



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