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27 October 2017

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Oct 27, 2017, 08:00am EDT



Two of Eddie Martinez's mandala works from his Davis Museum show, *Ants at a Picnic*. THE DAVIS MUSEUM

Artist Eddie Martinez first exhibited in Boston in 2005, and since then, his work, marked by linear abstraction, use of color, and ability to span across mediums a little over a decade later, the artist is coming full circle in a way with his first museum show at The Davis Museum at Wellesley College. The exhibition, titled *Ants at a Picnic*, which is on view until December 17, 2017, includes a series of new, frenetic large-scale mandala paintings, 17 tabletop painted bronze sculptures and drawings on paper. “The works in *Ants at a Picnic* make plain that Martinez has hit his stride,” said Dr. Lisa Fischman, Ruth Gordon Shapiro '37 director of the Davis Museum and curator of the exhibition. “The cosmic hooks, the summoning of spirits, the virtuoso line, the command of color and composition — it all adds up to its own kind of brilliance.” The artist also has an [exhibition](#) on view at The Drawing Center in New York until February 4, 2018. Martinez spoke to Forbes about the exhibition, why he selected that title, and his sculptures made of lobster traps and buoys.

Why is the title *Ants at a Picnic*?

I don't know. I think it's just a funny quote about something being spoiled. I don't know why it's spelled like that. It just kind of happened in the sketchbook. I was watching the highly intellectual television program *Family Guy* and they just did a funny bit about ants at a picnic and it really resonated with me. That's where it came from. It was a visual of ants - ruining a picnic.

What inspired this exhibition?

My assistant found these drawings of mandalas that I made in 2005 in a flat file and it totally rejuvenated my interest in them. And [Director] Lisa [Fischman] gave me a lot of freedom for what this exhibition could be. So I decided I wanted to revisit the mandalas and I started drawing them a lot. And then I started painting them. And that's just what it became. I was really wanting to do them large scale, which made a lot of sense for an institution. And we went from there.

When did you start to gravitate towards mandalas and why?

When I was really young I thought I was a Buddhist, or something. But, you know. I wasn't. I was always interested in meditation. I mean, now, I have a daily practice. I think I just liked the repetition. Also, they are really a container for shapes and marks. It's something I've gravitated to over the past decade – this idea of the container. I used to make these tabletop still lifes, where everything kind of fit into that rectangular shape. I also created a character - this other personality, or an alter ego, called Spirit Duder. And in the first Spirit Duder drawing—it's in the catalogue—he's looking up at this floating mandala with crazy eyeballs. I don't know. It's something that stuck with me.

Tell me about the mandalas you created for the exhibition.

Well, they're all based drawings, except for the black and white painting. They're all based on small drawings, and then they're blown up really huge. The first step is to silk screen them on canvas – just the black skeleton. And then I take it from there. The black and white painting is probably the most true to the original drawing.

Why is that one the only one without color?

Since I started using this process of silkscreen, in every body of work that I'm making, I like to make at least one piece that's black and white. But I'm also not comfortable with just silk screening on canvas and not adding anything to it. It's just not the kind of painting I'm interested in. So in this instance, I built up the black.

I know that the creation of mandalas is a spiritual practice. Do you get a spiritual fulfillment from creating these, or is it separate from your personal spirituality?

I think the act of drawing and the act of painting definitely fill a spiritual place for me. There's nothing intentional while making them - I don't try to present any kind of spiritual association. But that said, having them here in this room in the Davis Museum, when we installed this show two weeks ago, they were hanging and the lighting wasn't really ready yet, so it was kind of dim in here and I just sat and looked at them individually. And I had what could be considered a spiritual experience.

Tell me about the sculptures.

The sculptures I started making in 2013. I just sort of hit a wall with painting. So I went out to Long Island and started collecting stuff off the beach and marine-type things, like lobster traps and buoys. I really had no idea what to do or how to do it. I had the idea that I wanted to make sculpture for years, but I didn't know what that would be. And I tried a couple of different things, like having something fabricated and then painting it. That didn't feel right. Once I started futzing around with these things, you know, hot glue and super-rudimentary materials, it started to feel really natural to me. I think the found objects appealed to me because in a way I didn't have to commit to anything. A lot of objects I was finding already had their own life - they were already somewhat destroyed and in a unique shape. A half children's scissor, a bottle cap - small. It was a way to approach sculpture without having to be a sculptor. I felt like the next step would be to bring paint into it., so I started casting them in bronze and then painting them. Then it all made sense.

It seems there's a similarity to the mandalas. You said that they – it's about working within these boundaries and these limitations. I mean, I suppose a found object already – there's a certain limitation that might be kind of gratifying to work with. Is that accurate? Do you feel that?

No. They're just marks. I see these things as interpretations of the drawings and paintings. Some of them are ugly, some are half-assed Twomblys, But I also don't mind that.

Can you explain how your works are biographical in nature?

Well, when I talk about drawing as being biographical, it's because I always have paper or a pad or something. And so they're all biographical, in that way. I'm writing things down, what I'm thinking or hearing. When I travel I draw a lot.

You also have the show at the Drawing Center that's opening soon. And can you talk a little bit about that practice, highlighted there—your studio wall? You're always drawing.

Yeah. So I don't really draw in the studio. But all the small drawings, like the things that become these big paintings, etc. I do them at home, or out and about, and then I'll bring them into the studio. I put them up on the big wall so there's up to 1,000 drawings just kind of tacked together. I use that as a sounding board, and also sometimes I'll grab them while I'm painting and walk around and take things from them.