

**Apollo Magazine**

**Eddie Martinez**

By George Newall

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Currently on view at The Journal gallery in Brooklyn, this exhibition of works by New York-based, Eddie Martinez consists of five large-scale paintings, all derived from a single composition. These canvases, which form part of the ‘Matador’ series, are the product of Martinez’s endeavour to test and repeat, exhaustively, a basic arrangement of form and colour. For the artist, they are ‘a study in making the same painting, but differently.’

Undeniably, the works appear to be essentially alike when seen as a group, unanimously presenting an arrangement of abstract forms in palettes of red, yellow, blue and black. Martinez has borrowed the composition from an earlier series he produced, entitled, ‘American Native’, simplifying the elements before reusing them in this new group of works. Despite this common origin, each painting reveals its own unique character when viewed individually, one by one offering a distinct version of the principle theme. At close range, the canvases disclose unexpected elements – a buried sweet wrapper, a computer printout or a baby wipe. The occurrence of these banal, ‘real-life’ elements serves to complicate the artist’s plainspoken abstract method. Across the series, Martinez challenges the notion of a definitive rendering of any composition, offering a fascinating range of solutions.

With their skillful arrangement of coloured forms and ruggedly masculine handling of paint, these works invite a number of inevitable comparisons. There is a clear link with the post-War abstract painter – unmistakably Willem de Kooning and Ashile Gorky – and Martinez’s unapologetic channeling of these iconic figures is admirable. At a time when many artists are focusing on new mediums – in some cases to reflect on how digital technologies affect our lives – Martinez’s wholesale embrace of mid-century influences could be seen as a transgressive act (and he forms part a growing wave of abstract painters in the United States.)

Aside from these stylistic debts, the ‘matador’ theme has been used and re-used throughout art history – from Goya to Manet, through to Picasso, though Martinez has suggest that any formal resemblance to a bull is purely accidental. The matador points not so much to the content of his work or to artistic precedents, as to the determinedly physical nature of the artist’s practice. Pacing around his studio, Martinez often contends with several canvases at a time – like the bullfighter in his ring, this is a confident attack.