

Eddie Martinez: *Wavelengths*

By Barbara A. MacAdam | February 14, 2024



Eddie Martinez, *Emartllc No.5 (Recent Growth)*, 2023. Oil, acrylic, spray paint and silkscreen ink on linen, 72 x 108 inches. © Eddie Martinez. Courtesy the Artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

To “read” Eddie Martinez’s new show *Wavelengths* demands that we activate our propensity for a scattered, frenetic attention. In his paintings, Martinez, as ever, sends us spiraling through all possible associations, from nature to toys to politics, from still life to continual-motion life, to jazz and to sports.

From all colors to all materials, from literal observation to wild imagination, from European practice to American vision. From American regionalist painters such as modernist Stuart Davis to CoBrA Expressionists like Pierre Alechinsky to European modernists Matisse and Vuillard as well as cubists ranging from Juan Gris to Fernand Léger and then of course, graffiti, of which Martinez was a dedicated practitioner, like Barry McGee before him.

Obliterating and then activating colors and subjects by whitening them out in his series known as “Whiteouts,” and letting the undertext show through allows us to sense the presence of words, though we can’t decipher them. His painting is a form of poetry in motion, always activating abstraction, digging into its roots, showing where the sound of color and form convene. It’s synesthesia. Obviously, Martinez wants to say and show everything on his mind and in his eye at once.

Motion is implied in the title *Wavelengths*, allowing for a back and forth, physically and mentally, which leads to a kind of ebullient incoherence. The large painting *Emartllc No.5 (Recent Growth)* (2023) takes us from a “bufly,” (named after his young son’s mispronunciation of butterfly) on the left of the canvas to a flurry of activity exploding on the right, suggesting an uncontrolled migration of shapes as though the bufly were narrating his/her story. One senses fury and then quiet as we move right. Interestingly enough, while we don’t detect a single avenue of entry in most of these works, the bufly here leads the way from behind.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH



Left: Eddie Martinez, *Full Bloom*, 2023. Oil, acrylic paint, spray paint and footprint on linen, 60 x 48 inches. Right: Eddie Martinez, *Buflly No. 39 (Last Line)*, 2023. Oil and acrylic paint on linen, 72 x 60 inches. © Eddie Martinez. Courtesy the Artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

Mood and matter set the tone in the forceful still life *Full Bloom* (2023), featuring a huge white cup throwing bright colored bubbles out in continual conversation. The action is suggestive of ebullient incoherence. Yet, the painting is also Matissean in its evocation of domesticity and warmth.

Taking another tack, the painting *Buflly No. 39 (Last Line)* (2023) happily links text and landscape in the form of a palimpsestic white line with hints of activity in the bottom half of the painting, dividing the canvas horizontally. Below the line bob two scrawled faces in the style of CoBra artist Asger Jorn—a touch of angst and Art Brut. At the same time, Martinez brings to bear the conjunction of text and image bursting from the imagination.

It all brings to my mind a letter Vincent van Gogh wrote to fellow Post-Impressionist painter Émile Bernard in which he explained:

My brushstroke has no system at all. I hit the canvas with irregular touches of the brush, which I leave as they are. Patches of thickly laid-on color, spots of canvas left uncovered, here and there portions that are left absolutely unfinished, repetitions, savageries; in short, I am inclined to think that the result is so disquieting and irritating as to be a godsend to those people who have fixed, preconceived ideas about technique.

Martinez, who will represent San Marino at this year's Venice Biennale, in a show titled *Nomader*, alludes to the world today—with international nomads proliferating and their art and lifestyles and materials similarly spread out and about. It's a consistent element running through all of the artist's work. He is also showing at the Parrish Art Museum from June 30–September 29, 2024, where he will present his largest ever “Buflly” paintings.