

JUXTAPOZ

Art & Culture



Eddie Martinez

Fast Serve

Interview by Evan Pricco and portrait by Bryan Derballa

What do you discuss when talking to a painter's painter, the artist everyone cites as their favorite or an influential force? Well, you obviously talk about painting and painters. And, in the instance of sitting down with Brooklyn-based painter, Eddie Martinez, you chat about tennis, strategy and the art of collecting. There is an energy that emanates from Martinez's work, something hypnotic that whirs in constant motion. In a way, his idea about "exhausting compositions" does not feel like defeat but instead, a powerful indicator that a life in art isn't just one work, but about decades of output and practice. Martinez is

fascinated by speed, but also comfortable in volume, as he explained throughout an early morning winter conversation. We talked about his massive 65-foot painting recently shown in Shanghai, a newborn altering his schedule, and how his flower pot works will show up in an upcoming show with his wife, Sam Moyer, in San Francisco.



All paintings photographs by JSP Art Photography

***Evan Pricco:* Are you a “seven days a week in the studio” guy, or do you like to give yourself some time off to breathe a little?**

Eddie Martinez: I guess, especially now with the baby, I don't keep a schedule, really. I just come because there's not much else for me to do. This is what I do. So I come here, definitely Monday through Friday, unless I just don't want to, and I don't know if I'm making that sort of proclamation now that I have a kid. There was a little bit of a shift that happened organically, but I'm not thinking about that. I'm just thinking clearer in general, feeling more direct and confident. So, basically, the effect of what you're saying is happening on its own.

Could be, and I hate to say it, but these things tend to happen now that we're getting older.

Oh yeah, there's that too. I mean, yeah, I definitely wake up early, and by ten o'clock, I've already been up for four hours, so I'm just like, "All right, go to work." I don't go out. I don't party or anything. I just just keep it all pretty quiet.

I have this theory, which you can either confirm or deny, that compares musicians and painters directly when it comes to age. Musicians tend to write their best things when they're young, formulated by this sort of raw energy, but painters, to me, tend to really hit their peak as they get older and slow down; it's a very different sort of artistic output. I don't know... do you agree with that?

I definitely agree. I mean, I can't speak to the music side of things because I don't have any connection, other than liking it. I think that's definitely the case with painting. You know, they always say, "Oh, he's making mature work now." Regardless of whatever the the word mature means, they definitely don't ever say that about a 25 year old.



Flowers for Taiwan No. 4, Oil on canvas, 30" x 40", 2019, Courtesy the artist and Perrotin Gallery, Hong Kong.

All paintings photographs by JSP Art Photography.

When I visited last, you were about to go to Shanghai to the Yuz Museum, where you were going to be showing the epic, 65-foot painting. I never saw the work in person, but even across this tiny screen on my phone, I could feel the vibrancy of that painting. There's something really rare about that, and I was literally moved. Then I began to wonder how the artist feels, whether seeing your own work or another's, if you get that feeling.

That, like, kind of fluttery feeling? Yeah, oddly enough, last night I was on Instagram, on this account called **The Twist Archive**, a **Barry McGee** fan page. Whoever's running that account put this catalogue, like this old advertising work that Barry did for, I think, a bike park called Switch back in 1993. And Barry had illustrated this whole catalogue. It was just so weird, I've never seen anything like that, and I got really stoked. But that didn't make me want to go paint. What makes me want to go paint is this **Joe Light** painting that's hanging at **Marlborough Gallery** right now that I liked so much I had to buy.

Actually, I have another one. It wasn't on my screen, it was in person, and it was a **Helen Frankenthaler** painting, I guess maybe six years ago. It was just unbelievable. They could have said it was a **Kline, Motherwell, de Kooning, Pollock** or any of the so-called AbEx giants. Because she wasn't a dude, she's getting her props on that now, but it took a while. Took a while for **Joan Mitchell, Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, Grace Hartigan**, all these amazing women artists, to get their due. But this one particular painting by Frankenthaler, I was like giddy and freaking out, sad and nervous, and depressed and frantic, all at the same time. I just looked at it for like 30 minutes, then I just went and painted.



19 Yuz, Oil paint, spray paint, oil bar, acrylic, acrylic, linen and canvas collage with push pins on canvas, 796.5" x 114, 2019

All paintings photographs by JSP Art Photography

Do you find yourself more attracted to abstraction as something that moves you, or are you somebody for whom it doesn't really matter? It's just painter and technique?

For me, it's about speed, really. That's what gets me the most excited, something that is without a lot of thought. A lot of abstract painters, this stuff was all about speed. Even if it took them a long time, when they were making the actual marks, it was happening quickly. **Picasso** worked really quickly. Joan Mitchell... that's the stuff that gets me, when I see that, and I see on the canvas, it's still moving. It's not really a still thing. Then I'm like, "Oh, I want to go paint."

It's interesting you mentioned Picasso because one thing I've always loved about Picasso, in particular, was his volume—the amount of work. When I came to your home studio, I was overwhelmed at the number of drawings and works you had all around. I'm a huge fan of the artist who is constantly making.

Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, I can't say someone who doesn't make a lot of work isn't pushing it because I don't know. That may just be how they work. But someone like Picasso, not only was he making all kinds of work in different mediums all the time, he was also exhausting the same sort of compositions and imagery because he just felt like they were always variable. That's something that has hit me. That's something I just respond to with his work right away because it feels natural to me anyway. And seeing someone who did it their whole life sort of gave me more confidence to do it.



I'm not a painter, so stop me if this is a naive question. But, because you, or Picasso, really exhaust a composition, or just work on it over and over again, is that how you're able to have things in your work come and go through the years, and it doesn't feel forced or unnatural? Figures can disappear, then show up a decade later, and that part of the process seems *natural*. For example, your *Blockheads* have shown up periodically through the years, but never feel contrived.

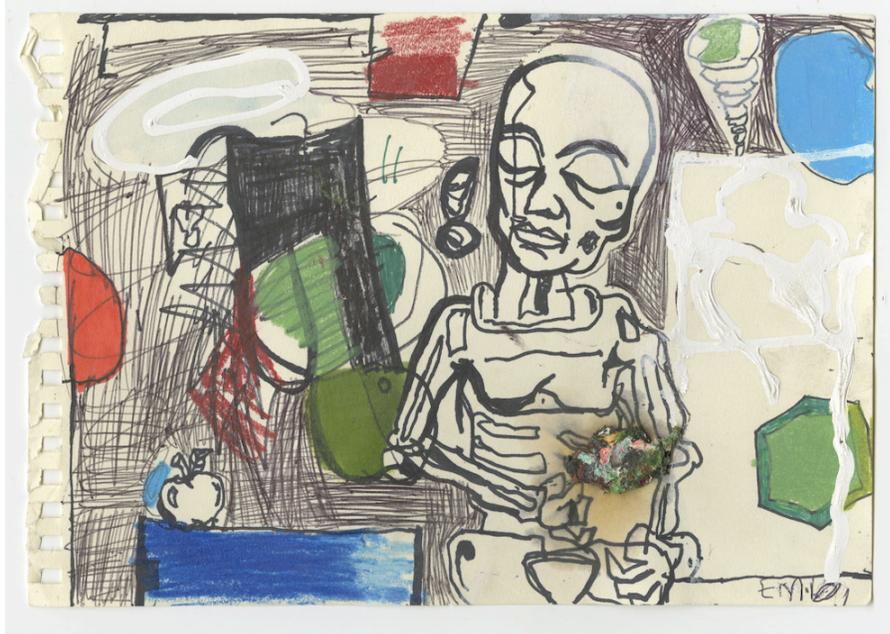
That's what it feels like to me. I'm going back to things that I made a decade ago and exploring them again now. I had someone over here the other day who noticed this big flower pot painting on the wall. She was blown away when she saw the date said 2020; she thought it was, like, a decade old. And if you were to actually look at two of the paintings side by side, apart from the subject matter being the same, they're radically different. Because it's a decade of my life and experience, and a decade of moving paint around, so a totally different thing.

And the *Blockheads*, I don't know, I'm just walking out with that stuff, I guess. When it feels right, I do it and if it feels wrong, I don't. Even yesterday, I said to myself, "I need to stop with these things." But that doesn't mean anything. That just means right now. They'll resurface, they'll come back. It probably won't be next week, but they'll definitely return. I mean, I'm going to be showing some at my **Ratio 3** show I'm doing in San Francisco with my wife, Sam Moyer.

Does the kind of energy you got from painting when you were younger still motivate?

Oh, that's interesting. I think I'm still moved by the same stuff I was moved by back then. Like **Guston**. I'll see a Guston I've never seen, say, on Instagram, and still think, "That's insane." It could have been done the same day as something else we've seen on postcards and in every museum gift shop, but it still holds that power.

I think I was just feeding myself this stuff a lot more and at a faster pace when I was younger. Now I feel like I've done enough research. If I see something new, I look into it, but I'm not loading up my plate anymore.



But are there people you discover now who make you think, “Wow, how did I miss this?”

There was this British painter I learned about a few years ago, **Alan Davie**. I love those paintings, and I'm surprised I never saw them, because they're pretty closely linked to other painters that I already did know back then.

When making a 65-foot painting, like you did for the Yuz, do you find that process more liberating than working on a smaller canvas? Not to imply those are easier...

I mean, 65 feet is exceptionally huge, but generally, I do prefer a larger size. My standard big size is 6 x 9 feet. That's like my sweet spot.

Sweet spot as in that's where you feel you're most comfortable?

Yeah, and that's a big painting. Right now, I'm looking at these little canvases on the floor which are, I don't know, roughly 20" x 20". They're just hideous, and I'm uncomfortable doing them. I can't make the marks. It's too slow and too much to think about. There's too much to consider. I don't like it.



Untitled (Double-stack Black Background), Silkscreen ink, spray paint, enamel, acrylic and ink on canvas, 60" x 72," 2019, Courtesy the artist and Perrotin Gallery, Hong Kong
All paintings photographs by JSP Art Photography

I know you are a big tennis fan, and I'm sure you have been up to watch the Australian Open. Do you see a correlation between tennis and the work that you make?

Oh, yeah, it correlates, for sure. It's the same part of my brain, in a way. Same sort of obsession. Like when you are growing up and skating, most people you knew who skated were also super into the clothes, magazines, videos, and all aspects of it, right? I'm like that with art, and I'm like that with tennis. It's mental, emotional, physical, it's all those different things. It's also like chess.

Who is your favorite tennis player of all time?

Federer. I just can't help it. There's no one else who moves the way he does.

It's perfect because I wanted to bring up the David Foster Wallace essay about Roger Federer. To me, not only is that the best essay ever written about an athlete, but there was a combination of detailing grace and ability to freestyle that fits into what I think about your painting.

I love that essay. The thing that interests me is that Wallace fancied himself like a serious player, right? And you never really actually see any documentation of that, ever.



I think this goes back to just talking about painting and painters, and that energy we feel. The romance of it is just as important. I read in the last interview we did together that you were a house painter. How does having a more utilitarian job in painting help? What advice can you provide?

I'm not alone in saying this, and I think a lot of artists would say probably the same thing, but the job that will get you closest to the art world is being an art handler in an institution, gallery or shipping company. On a daily basis, you're at least seeing paintings that would not normally be seen. You're handling them and hearing the vocabulary used to describe them. And I was a really bad art handler.

How can you be a bad art handler?

Oh, you should see how I handle my own work. It's like a goat with pizza boxes. It's not pleasant. I just throw these things around. I think a lot of artists are really fragile with their work, but I think a lot are not because it's still very much theirs.



Pink House Sarasota FL 1986, Silkscreen ink, oil paint, spray paint, enamel and Sharpie on canvas, 96" x 75", 2019, Courtesy the artist and Perrotin Gallery, Hong Kong
All paintings photographs by JSP Art Photography

Again, I was so impressed by the 65-foot painting. Is there anything you can take from doing something so epic? Or do you have to just move on because that was the opportunity to do it?

There's a ton that I took from it. Just in painting, technique and mainly confidence, honestly. I definitely got a little boost from the making of it and seeing it installed.

We talked about paintings that move you, but do you have places in the art world which you consider to be pilgrimage worthy?

Sure! For one, the **Louisiana Museum** in Denmark. It's insane. The landscape and the setting is amazing. The way the art is presented is amazing. The way it's juxtaposed (no pun intended) with other things is really cool. It's just awesome. For a little while, it was the **Pollock-Krasner House** out in Long Island. We would go out there a couple of times a summer. Now, going forward, I would say, Japan. **The Art Island of Naoshima** will become one of those.

At this point, is art collecting something that's almost part of your practice?

Definitely. I mean, collecting has always been a part of my life, whether it was stamps, coins, comic books, or whatever. In 1988, the one year I lived in San Francisco, I was in fifth grade and I was the treasurer of the Benjamin Franklin stamp club. Very exciting.



You were the treasurer? Couldn't make it to be the president?

I was a big philatelist. Big into philately. I still have all my stamps. I don't collect stamps anymore, but I appreciate them.

What is the weirdest thing you've sought to collect, but have yet to discover?

I guess this would be considered weird, and it's not because I like him, but I would love to own (and can't seem to get my hands on) a Ronald Reagan drawing. Have you ever seen these drawings? They're doodles. There's a book called *Presidential Doodles*, and it has all these drawings from presidents. Some of these things are absolutely fucking terrifying. And they're always on White House letterhead. Some of them are psychedelic crazy shit. Just Google "**Reagan presidential doodles**".