

ArtSeen

Eddie Martinez: *Inside Thoughts*

By **Barbara A. MacAdam**

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Eddie Martinez, *Untitled*, 2021. Oil on canvas in artist's frame, 75 7/8 x 96 7/8 inches. © Eddie Martinez. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

Meaty and heady, Eddie Martinez's densely packed paintings, rich with associations and imagery—all in the form of quotidian objects, sports paraphernalia, kitchen and dining items, art-history fragments—refuse to commit to a specific time or style. Martinez's

sensibility is part of a diffuse modernist past—Dada, Fluxus, Neo Realism, Cubism, Surrealism, food art, and so on—as well as a huge sampling of the contemporary zeitgeist, including skateboards and graffitied walls. In a canvas titled *Embarcadero 88* (2020), frightening black-outlined, ghostlike faces stare out at us like terrified immigrants or victims of a natural disaster, while organic shapes punctuate paintings in the company of board games, lots of flowers, and playing cards.

Martinez is much inspired by the CoBrA artists, Europe's answer to Abstract Expressionism. The group emerged from Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam and stretched out to Paris; it included Carl Henning Pedersen, Karel Appel, Corneille, Asger Jorn, and Pierre Alechinsky. These embedded elements of figuration and dreaming and the unconscious, as well as the often cartoonish drawings, distinguish these European abstractionists—and characterize much of Martinez's work.



Eddie Martinez, *Untitled*, 2020. Oil, acrylic, and spray paint on canvas, 72 x 108 inches. © Eddie Martinez. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

There is also so much of Guston here, specifically in the block-shaped heads. Picasso, too, looms large in *Untitled* (2020), a portrait of a mother, a father, a young child, and a jumping cat

sitting at a table with a banana split, a newspaper, a plate, and a bowl of fruit, above a Bonnard-like spread before them. Here we experience a face-to-face intimacy amid life's routines and non sequiturs.

It's also as if Martinez was thinking about both Matisse and the sports news found in the morning newspapers. *Sleeper in Reality Dream* (2019) shows a boxer with a face mask and boxing gloves sprawled out on the ground, anchoring the picture. Two Picasso-esque disembodied eyes and a bulbous Guston-type head sporting a black eye are positioned at center, along with an assortment of incidentals, including a little red man standing to the side. Martinez shows he has a head full of ideas, material and ephemeral, that may or may not be driving him insane—miraculously, in this time of lockdown. The ideas also come in substantive form: impastoed items, like baby wipes and studio garbage, are tacked to his canvas's surfaces and images.



Eddie Martinez, *Primary*, 2020. Oil on canvas in artist's frame, 72 7/8 x 108 7/8 inches. © Eddie Martinez. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

I'm reminded of the conceptual Swiss artist Dieter Roth, who populated his artworks with chocolate sculptures of animals and

rotting foodstuff, together with drawings and books and paint cans and brushes, and of the Neo-Realist Swiss artist Daniel Spoerri whose “snare-pictures,” as he explained, are “objects found in chance positions, in order or disorder (on tables, in boxes, drawers, etc.)”

Not only are these, like Spoerri’s accumulations, still lifes, but they are also documents of memory—of how we recall and fix things based on their placement and the visual hierarchies that surround them. In contrast to his more material paintings, Martinez delves into the realm of the less apparently or suggestively solid with his series of “White Out” paintings, in which he applies white paint over colored lines, alluding to de Kooning’s erasure paintings and his own power to erase his conceptions and change his mind while keeping what was there.

Martinez most often applies primary colors to dramatic, non hierarchical effect. Reviewing Stuart Davis in *ARTnews* in 1957, Elaine de Kooning observed how “a [Stuart Davis] painting with its plain, strong, ‘ready-made’ colors and sharply cut-out shapes, has somewhat the effect of a good sock on the jaw— sudden, emphatic and not completely pleasant.” This could be said of some of Martinez’s most powerful works.