

Joshua Abelow and Peter Eide in Conversation

Peter Eide: I'm into the overlapping forms with the painting and photography. It's wild to see your work flirt with hyper sophistication – there's a weight to these new paintings. It's a vibe, for sure. I haven't quite put my finger on it.

I like the added meta context of the images of you. They give life to the work, and there's a slightly nerdy, yet endearing quality in the way in which the paintings become deconstructed. You seem to be in a new phase; letting yourself hang out in the work warts and all. The hermetic quality of the earlier paintings has relaxed into a confident painterliness that I'm excited about.

The photograph of the irregular oval median with the tree connects with the forms in your recent paintings.

Then, I see a cow, and the repeated form of the oval now gives me a playful, alien abduction type of tableau – elevated Rorschachs in the shape of UFO Tic Tacs. It's funny and absurd in equal measure.

JA: I think the photos of me (taken mostly by Katya, two by Tisch) are nice to include as a subtext to the exhibition in the form of this book. You and I were talking about Bas Jan Ader the other night and I'd say that *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)* (1973) has been a point of reference. I like that Ader's work is deeply personal and romantic. In the context of which he was a part, the burgeoning conceptual art movement in Los Angeles, it was unusual to be so emotional and I'm sure that's part of the reason it's taken decades for his work to grow in popularity. When he went missing in 1975 (the year before I was born) he wasn't well known and it remained that way for a long time. In terms of the *One Night in Los Angeles* piece – I like that his wife took the photos of him wandering around holding up a flashlight. It's very comical and very sad at the same time.

PE: *In Search of the Miraculous* is about searching for the unknown; a perfect metaphor to express the experience of artistic experimentation. Chartering an impossibly small boat across the sea is risky, and his disappearance raises a lot of questions. Ader is like Houdini performing one final, disappearing act.

This synthesizes with the persona of Freddy you've created. There is an element of mystique surrounding you, deliberate on your part, calculating a mysteriousness that invites the viewer to investigate further. It's a game of Texas Hold 'em in that you keep your cards close to your vest – whether or not you're holding a royal flush or bluffing becomes immaterial. The fact that you obstruct a full view contributes to the intrigue; the resonance occurs not when you lay your cards on the table, but rather through a carefully curated 'trickling out' of only what you care to share with the world – decisions cultivated through a deliberate selection.

To circle back to the idea of deconstruction: you're figuratively lifting the curtain of your mystery a bit. We get to see the goofy, flawed vulnerable artist of-a-certain-age, in his awkward, sophisticated glory, injecting the paintings with a level of humanity reminiscent of the

exuberance and delight of your drawings (the drawings I saw on Delancey Street before we first met years ago). I see you looking at motifs and forms in the wild, that I'm also viewing in the photos you took of various real-life objects, and then in the resulting paintings – it makes me feel like I'm peering inside your mind.

JA: I've never inserted myself into the work quite so directly (as these images of me taking photos). Which is kind of funny considering I didn't even know the photographs were being taken.

PE: I've been thinking about stages of life lately – in a general sense. Regarding my own life and work, I feel like I've entered a new phase. These feelings are accompanied by a desire to shift my aesthetic sensibilities into new, experimental, and unknown territories. I can't pinpoint what brought about this desire, because I believe the catalyst is more nebulous; I'm certain many factors such as potentially exhausting certain languages that have permeated my work for the last ten years have something to do with it. But, I'm curious – I've known you for ten years at this point and you seem to be in a new phase. Am I correct in this observation? I know you've had some tremendous life changes as of recent, and I'm curious to know how they've affected you and your work, if at all. I'm seeing some things with *Targets* that indicate a relaxation in some of the more formal, academically rigorous qualities in your previous bodies of work. But also, some of the paintings appear miraculously more serious and studied. It also appears that you're wearing some Ab Ex heroes on your sleeve a bit more, as if you're more comfortable with them. Do you find any resonance in this? I'm getting some contradicting truths, which makes the work more unpredictable and compelling – like you're creating jazz music.

JA: Since reconnecting with Katya, now more than three years ago, time folds in on itself in ways that are equally bizarre, magical, and seemingly 'meant to be.' I've been thinking about fate and, in particular, my fate. I'm doing my best to trust my intuitive decision-making abilities. I'm allowing more 'play' in the paintings. And I'm interested in this relationship that is evolving between my paintings and my photographs of Frederick. I think there's a general feeling of return – returning to something that was left behind. Maybe this is what happens in middle age – we stop rushing forward. We become more comfortable with the present and with looking back.

Joshua Abelow is an artist and curator based in Harris, NY. In 2014, Abelow founded Freddy in Baltimore, later moving the project upstate in 2016.

Peter Eide is an artist and curator based in New Windsor, MD (where Clyfford Still lived and worked from 1966 until his death in 1980). In 2021, Eide founded Maurice, a Baltimore-based curatorial project focusing on experimentation.

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