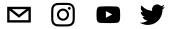


10th Edition Opens 2024

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ARTIST ERIC UHLIR

Nov 11 • Written By Chantal Boynes

Congratulations to Eric Uhlir for earning his place as a finalist in the 6th Edition!

WHO ARE YOU?

I was born in Hinsdale, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago in 1979. My parents moved our family to Los Angeles shortly after my twin brother and I were born. Our mom was an art major in college, and she used to pile us into the car with our friends to go on art adventures to LACMA. Between her teaching us art history and these frequent trips to museums, my brother and I had an early grounding in art as an acceptable profession. After moving to San Antonio and attending high school, my brother and I both enrolled in the University of Texas, Austin to study art. Art has always been a given in my life, and I’ve made drawings and paintings my whole life. I don’t think I ever doubted it would be central to my life in one form or another.

Currently live in Washington DC with my number one fan, my partner Phoebe, and our dog Violet. We both love art and travel a lot, especially to see interesting exhibitions, art fairs and museums. I’m an avid swimmer. I love the weird vibes inherent of any kind of vacation town, especially in their “off season. I documented live music when I lived in Austin, so music, sound and proximity to other forms of creativity and creators is very inspirational to me. My favorite museum is the Ft. Worth Modern. My favorite painter is Cecily Brown. My favorite band is Beach House. I think we all need to spend more time finding ways to be more kind. I believe that black lives matter. We should respect indigenous land and the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination. All human beings, regardless of gender identity, deserve the right to absolute bodily autonomy. The well-being of labor is paramount to capital and our highest purpose is to be better stewards of our planet and each other.





“Order of the Dawn” (Finalist Work)

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO UTILIZE PAINTING AS A MEDIUM?

I discovered my love of oil painting in high school, when my art teacher Mr. Ricketts encouraged me to try it as a next step from my love of drawing. The technical nature of oil paint and the luminous results hooked me early in my discovery process. The idea of being able to shape new ideas over time periods I could control felt really empowering as an artist.



“Rejoice in Nature”

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

CAN YOU DISCUSS THE INSPIRATION AND THOUGHT PROCESS BEHIND "ORDER OF THE DAWN"?

I've been fascinated by our relationship with nature and the almost constant search for utopias and arcadias. This idea that civilization and nature need constant human intervention to reach a state of "perfection". Growing up in California in the 80's, I witnessed this almost constant spread of the suburban sprawl out into the desert and was fascinated by the idea that all of these homes were trying to tame the arid Mojave desert.

All of my work metabolizes various references, usually with one or two more central than others. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was a secret society from the late 19th century that was devoted to metaphysics and the occult. One of their core beliefs was the concept of the Arcadian society, or a new form of civilization that would establish a utopian agrarian society, sort of an "improved" natural order. It's a quirk of our species that throughout the evolution of civilization, and no matter the geography, we seem preternaturally driven to conquer or improve nature. The painting depicts a pieta-like figure based on a Delacroix drawing. In the original drawing, it's very ambiguous what the Lion's relationship to the man really is, and I was fascinated by this idea that our relationship with nature is so ambiguous. We are both threatened by nature but also a threat to it. I'm fascinated by animals like lions because, prior to the Anthropocene, they used to range across a vast swath of Europe and Eurasia. Imagine lions roaming the forests of southern Germany and the Bosphorus Strait. My subjects and titles are often a puzzle I want the viewer to unlock. I want both bringing their own interpretations to what they're seeing but also doing your own Google. I hope that the references help people to form a deeper relationship with art and art history, and by extension our own personal relationship with those stories. As a studio mate once told me, the paintings reward the process of looking.



"Natural Crossing"

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH THE TECHNICAL STEPS OF CREATING "ORDER OF THE DAWN"?

All of my paintings start with one of two grounds; an oil-based ground that's either a thin wash that blocks out a composition or a sprayed ground to create a gradient. Both techniques create a surface to respond to and help mediate brush speed when I begin laying down the primary layers. Some paintings have an underlying drawing, but most are an exercise in observation of reference materials and muscle memory gained from studies and preparatory drawings. Order of the dawn is the former, with an oil ground and a loose charcoal drawing that roughed out the composition and figures. Mark making in the work is both additive and reductive, using brushes, scrapers, rags and other tools to lay paint down and strip it away. Early layers are almost entirely mediated with Gamsol, with subsequent layers using varying types of medium including solvents, oils and alkyds. It's all a complicated dance to find new ways to satisfy my curiosity about the physical ways I can push paint around.



"Unity and Division"

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

YOUR WORK IS VERY VIBRANT AND UTILIZES BRIGHT INTENSE COLOR, CAN YOU DISCUSS WHY YOU CHOSE THIS FOR YOUR WORK?

My palette owes largely to the influence of growing up in sunny, vibrant places like California and Texas. I think that quality of pervasive light and pop culture merged with my love of classical painting, seeped into my brain and just never left. I think it also helps draw viewers into work that sometimes deals with thorny subjects, like global warming or political violence. I also metabolize a lot of references, from Delacroix to Cecily Brown, but want to balance classical palettes with my own personal aesthetic.



“Indio”

Oil on Linen (2 panels)

By Eric Uhler

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WORK?

My work straddles a line between the figurative and abstract. They're explorations of the physical nature of paint and our shared reality. Mark Jenkins from the Washington Post once said the paintings contained heroic poses that dissolve into puddles of paint. I think that's a wonderfully pithy way to sum them up!



"Might"

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO COMMUNICATE TO AN AUDIENCE WITH YOUR WORK?

To think more deeply about our shared history, our impact on each other and how these forces affect our relationship with the natural world.



"The Miami"

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

HAVE YOU EXPERIMENTED WITH OTHER MEDIUMS?

I frequently work with water-based media like watercolor, ink, gouache and flashe. I also alternate between doing studies on my iPad and traditional paper media. I would like to get into lithography if I can ever find the time. I've always had a conflicted relationship with the idea of multiples, which is why I don't offer prints, but lithography as a process fascinates me.



“Rivalry (Odom vs Rondo)”

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhler

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING EXPERIENCE DURING THE PROCESS OF CREATING YOUR WORK?

Every piece is a journey, with lots of dead ends and other detours along the way. Finding a balance between my layers of mark making and preserving space in each painting is the constant balancing act. Each painting takes weeks or months of experiments, breakthroughs and constant observation to try and decode and coax the final work out of the process. I think my biggest learning from this has been learning to kill my darlings in service of a larger composition. It's easy to fall in love with little moments and want to protect them, but often those moments might impede the success of whole piece. It's those tough decisions, sometimes agonizing ones, that teach me the most about my process.



“Rivalry (Johnson vs Bird)”

Oil on Linen

By *Eric Uhler*

CAN YOU DISCUSS YOUR BIGGEST SUCCESS SINCE STARTING YOUR ARTISTIC JOURNEY?

I would say my biggest success was securing my dealer, Caitlin Berry after a solo show in DC. My practice is extremely motivated by my intrinsic need to create, but every artist wants to share their work, right? That shot of external validation was a great shot in the arm. She is now the director of the new Rubell Museum in DC so our professional relationship came to a close, but her support meant the world to me. Support is crucial to an artist, and I'm lucky to have a lot of it, especially from the artistic community in DC and especially my partner Phoebe, who's probably my biggest fan!



"Chicago"

Oil on Linen

By *Eric Uhler*

WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON CURRENTLY? CAN YOU DISCUSS THEM?

Right now I'm finishing a large commission for the government practice of a consulting firm. This piece is an epic exploration of democracy as a reflection of diverse social structures and symbols. One of my primary lines of inquiry centers around our relationship with colonial art history and how the formative conflicts and events depicted by artists like Trumbull and West have a through line that connects to our contemporary struggles. The body of work was inspired by the right-wing insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th. I ducked a few groups of insurrectionists on my way to the studio that morning, and the ensuing violence definitely left a deep impression on my perception of living in DC how history shaped the mindset of the violent mob. Those events inspired me to start exploring the mythology that those groups corrupted to justify their violent rhetoric. To me it's all part-and-parcel with the uniquely human hubris reflected in our exploitation of nature, politics and culture to justify mechanisms of control.



“Demasted”

Oil on Linen

By Eric Uhlir

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM PROJECT OR PIECE YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

I would love to work on an even larger scale, like Julie Mehretu’s paintings at SF MOMA or Tintoretto sized canvases. I think I’m the most comfortable with the physical act of painting when it’s at scale.

LASTLY, I LIKE TO ASK EVERYONE WHAT ADVICE THEY WOULD GIVE TO THEIR FELLOW ARTISTS/PHOTOGRAPHERS, WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE?

You have to show up to make the work. Physically, mentally and emotionally. The most important part of any artistic practice is discipline, whether it comes naturally or you have to work at it. I keep regular hours in the studio and work almost every day. It’s important to take breaks and take care of yourself and recharge, but I try to work as much as possible. We only have so much time in our lives and we’re blessed as artists with this gift, don’t take it for granted.

To view more of Eric Uhlir’s work

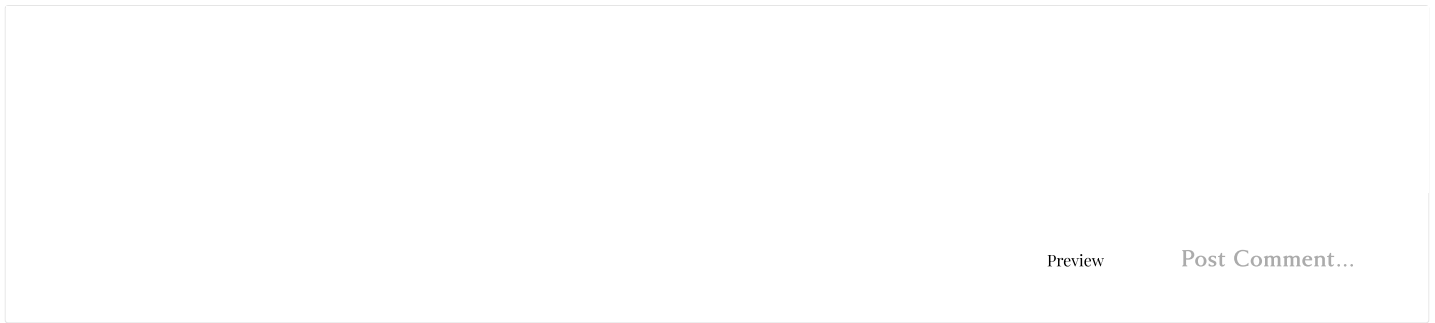
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Chantal Boynes

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