

festooning a fourth. Some paintings explode from their center, while others appear to be collapsing in on themselves. Indeed, some works evince a nucleus, while others sprawl more or less evenly across the canvas, as if taking over a landscape. You can find your corporeal self reflected in myriad linear aggregations, or you can feel your soul approximated by the clusters of color, now dour, now ecstatic, that blossom throughout.

Sanders uses color elaborately but strategically. Despite their optical brilliance his works are not about color, however colorful they may be, but about form, movement, and the role(s) colors play in defining and driving such form and movement. Color is costume in this context, enhancing the source of shape and kinesis—not superficially, but neither profoundly. Sanders' paintings in fact derive their urgency from their cataclysmic presence, and that presence wears the spectrum like a flag or a cloak. Color here is a declaration of voltage; that charge itself embodies—that is, gives body to—the form.

The pandemic may be waning. (Then again, it may not be.) But the changes it rang in people's minds and hearts remain. Before 2020 Eric Sanders had been going for expanse and depth, braving a series of painterly but also quasi-geometric works that seemed to chomp at the bit, brimming with force and fury but locked into a tight, even self-conscious regimen. While making these, Sanders also experimented with works on paper, with lithography transfer, even with painterly digital prints, to varying degrees of success and revelation. These endeavors, more than his larger paintings of the time, were moving him into a more fluid, active place, and the COVID lockdown was, ironically, the last step in the liberation of Sanders' painting.

The freedom these recent gestural abstractions declare is the freedom born of self-reflection and unstinting experiment, the kind of freedom that fills even a jail cell with the many dimensions of our universe. No wonder these paintings feel like dances even as they look like astronomical tsunamis: they are manifestations of intricate liberation, propagating the change that birthed them. Their overarching title, Sanders explains, comes from a dystopian science fiction film in which a protagonist observes ash falling from the sky and corrects his young son's misidentification. "That's Not Snow" points at the apocalyptic quality of both the world of the pandemic and the world post pandemic. These paintings look into the sun for the end of our species and the earth we know, at once bemoaning and glorying in the immolation. Ashes to ashes...

Peter Frank
Los Angeles
October 2022/January 2023



Print Self-Portrait 8
2022, Acrylic and ink on Linen, 14" x 11"



Print Self-Portrait 1
2022, Acrylic and ink on Linen, 14" x 11"



Print Self-Portrait 6
2022, Acrylic and ink on Canvas, 19" x 14.5"



Print Self-Portrait 4
2022, Acrylic and ink on Canvas, 19" x 14.5"

Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts
501 Broad Street, Gadsden, AL 35901
culturalarts.com



StudioSanders.com
Instagram: @eric_sanders_art

Eric Sanders: Painting on Fire



August 16–December 31, 2023
Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts

Eric Sanders: Painting on Fire

No one made better use of the pandemic years than artists. All over the world, painters and sculptors and ceramicists and digitizers retreated into their studios to turn the enforced staycation into a period of research, experiment, and renewal. Eric Sanders was among those who turned the studio into a spiritual as well as material laboratory. In his case Sanders broke through issues of scale, gesture, and medium, committing—well, re-committing—himself, in a series of large canvases titled "That's Not Snow," to the unique phenomenon of painting.

Painting is both a repository for human culture and a springboard for self-realization. In a painting, the awareness of the individual—a self-selecting, self-aware inventor—meets the knowledge and expectations of the audience—a self-aware, self-selecting army of witnesses. The abstract expressionists understood this as a performative, even theatrical undertaking, regarding the canvas not just as a visual field but as a site of action and connection. Clearly, the abstract expressionist aesthetic—or, if you would, ethos—motivates Sanders as well. But if the original abstract expressionists fed on mid-century postwar angst, Sanders' equally expansive painterly exploration finds its vitality in the broader, more insistent metamorphosis of life in the electronic age. We live at a time of miracles and omens, inspirations and disasters, all of them brought about in some way by us. If the painters of seventy years ago bemoaned the smallness and helplessness of the human race, we are now at once more confident and more despairing—and also more metaphysical, as we discover universes (rather than just weapons) in atoms, and atoms in universes.

Sanders' vast passages of eruption and elaboration expend a great deal of energy moving, doing, and just being. That expenditure is the point. If we are to take away realizations about our world from these paintings, if they are to codify our current condition, they must be seen not as expressions of feelings, but records of observations and reactions, generators of their own energy whether earthbound or suspended in space. In Sanders' planetary choreographies, he is less interested in the dancers than he is in the dance, and his bursts and ribbons seem to record a moment, or an eternity, of movement. That movement is itself both human and galactic, following the arcs of arms and the billowing of nebulae until a kind of universal palimpsest melding us with the cosmos—and ignoring relative scale for absolute size—emerges. You can almost see your star from here.

However much this describes and reveals the overall sense of Sanders' immensities, it does not account for the variety he makes available among this group of pandemic "That's Not Snow" abstractions. If they speak with the same language, each has its own dialect. The volcanic froth of one does not echo the citric glow of another; the coagulation of scribbles in the corner of yet another radiates a very different vibrancy than the loops and whiplashes

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The Waiting Line For Salvation, 2021, oil, paintstick and acrylic on canvas, 79" x 82"



TOP *When All Hell Breaks Loose*, 2020, oil, paintstick and acrylic on canvas, 78.5" x 113.5"
BOTTOM *Strange Days #3*, 2020, oil, acrylic, and paint stick on canvas, 78.5" x 120.75"



Brute Force, 2021, oil, acrylic, paint stick, and enamel house paint on Canvas, 79" x 62"



TOP *Coming Unraveled*, 2020, oil on canvas, 81.5" x 123"



BOTTOM *They Told Me You Were Harmless*, 2020, oil, paint stick, charcoal, oil based enamel and acrylic paint on canvas, 79.5" x 116.5"