

think piece

STORY
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PHOTOGRAPHY
COURTESY OF THE MCCLAIN GALLERY

CHRISTIAN ECKART CAN'T GET OUT OF HIS HEAD. THAT'S WHY, BETWEEN CLASSES AND COMMISSIONS, HE ROARS AROUND HOUSTON ON HIS MOTO GUZZI VII.

New York, Berlin, Amsterdam, Houston. Canadian-born Christian Eckart has recently settled in the Bayou City after 20-some years living and creating in the world's modern and classic art capitals. He's been the focus of more than 60 solo exhibitions as well as 150-plus group shows throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Since his Texas migration, Eckart has masterminded 11 commissioned works and coached budding artists at The Glassell School of Art and, more recently, at The University of Houston. And this, he considers a breather.

When viewing Eckart's razor-edged, highly engineered artworks, it's easy to see his inspirations Ellsworth Kelly and James Turrell. But the casual gallery-goer wouldn't guess he's a fan of Giotto and Correggio, too. We pick his brain about the process, labels and eternal strive for originality that comes with being a contemporary artist in Texas.

Carolyn Farb: Were you destined to be an artist?
Christian Eckart: When I was 11, I taught a friend to

draw. In a short time, he drew better than me. I got discouraged and thought, 'Forget this art business.' Later, I found myself going to art school, and the minute I got there, the old curiosities emerged, and I reverted to the artist I was meant to be.

Would you characterize your art as minimalist?

I feel more aligned with the Nouveaux Réalistes. I'm not fond of art world categories. Apparently, Donald Judd was never comfortable with the term minimalist. People from various disciplines, such as musical composition, painting and experimental theater, were grouped under the heading minimalism, and they came up with the term maximalist – where one would attempt to deliver maximum impact in a spare, specific package.

"I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THE NOUN 'ART'. I AM INTERESTED IN THE VERB 'ART' – THE ACTION OR EVENT THAT TAKES PLACE BETWEEN THE VIEWER AND OBJECT."

Who are your mentors?

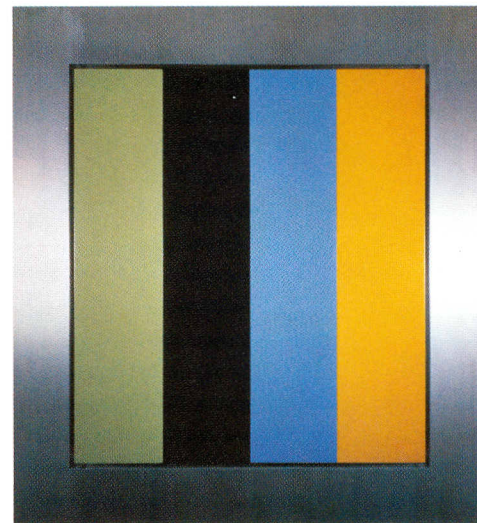
Kasimir Malevich, Yves Klein, Ad Reinhardt, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Ryman and James Turrell. I am a lover of Renaissance and Baroque masters such as Giotto, Zurbaran, Carracci, as well as Northern Neo-Primitives van der Weyden and van Eyck.

Is the viewer important to you?

I prioritize the viewer by making a significant effort to erase authorship from my work. For instance, I don't use my own hands to make it. I use the skills and technologies of fabricators and the hands of their employees and the materials and technologies of production used in everyday life – Plexiglas, Formica, metals, automobile lacquer. My goal is to empower the viewer and help them understand the art experience; they are the authors of it. I am fascinated with the human drive for something transcendental.

How do artists maintain their originality?

Many successful artists come up with only one or two primary gestures. They just reproduce those over and over. I work in a more European model, in which



ECKART'S LACQUER AND ALUMINUM SACRA CONVERSAZIONE #1302, 1990.

there is no signature style or type of work. I believe that if an artist stays with his original motivations, imperatives and line of inquiry, the likelihood that interesting works will be generated is very high.

Yet people recognize your work?

Yes, the pieces end up having a subliminal style. My works have a stylistic continuity.

Plans for the future?

New art is more information technology-based and more process- than product-oriented. However, since I'm a dedicated object-maker, I've been thinking about what it means to make objects in the 21st century.

I've seen you riding your lime green motorcycle around Houston.

Riding clears my head. I find it very liberating to be deeply immersed in something other than my head. Unfortunately, I'm one of those people that probably thinks too much.

Are you a thinking man's artist?

If I could claim to be a promoter of conscious engagement, I would consider that a success.

Go to www.christianeckart.com.



CHRISTIAN ECKART AND HIS CIRCUIT PAINTING #2802, 2000.