

ROBERT EGERT
m o r p h o p o l i s

**NEW
PAINTINGS**

ROBERT EGERT

m o r p h o p o l i s

Oct 3 - Dec 19 - 2015

With Guest Artists Chris Fiore and Tobias Tak

Oct 3 | 7–9:30 PM | Opening Night
Performance by (NOS) (a genre-fluid mental health tribute band)
Andrea Egert LSW – vocals
Jack Schwartz PhD – guitar
Billy Paige CpD – drums

Nov 14 | 8:00–10 PM | Movie Night
with Eva Schicker and Chris Fiore

Dec 19 | 7–10 PM | Closing Party

Catalog essay by Laura J. Padgett



Shapes have a memory of their own, a life of their own. The creator of a particular shape conjures a life force within the shape. Not a life force recorded by the process of painting but rather inherent in the shape itself by using line and form to bring a shape with agency into being. — RE

Robert Egert • Bleeding Hearts and Distraught Souls
Cannot Prevail Against Economic Systems Designed by Non-Human Constructs
oil, acrylic, tempera on canvas • 60 x 48 • 2015 • collection of Paul Little

Let's have a look at this. Let's observe closely. When we regard any kind of artwork today we can identify a plethora of references: art historical, cultural, societal, some visual. How can we contemplate what an artwork is about while at the same time see what it is? How do non-visual references influence, not what an artwork looks like, but how we see it? How do we know what something is about? How do we inform ourselves as viewers to be educated enough to know what we are comprehending when viewing an artwork?

These are questions that immediately run through my mind when I look at art, especially Robert Egert's — and I have been looking at his work throughout his entire career. Is what we see a story, a satire, a microscopic enlargement, an analysis of DNA or patterns taken from a satellite view?

Robert Egert is an artist who thrives from the confluence of many arteries. When I met him during foundation year at Pratt Institute I was impressed that he was born and raised in Brooklyn. Still, I don't know if I was more impressed by his knowledge of Greek and Roman myths, I think they kind of balanced each other out.

This is important. This is important to be able to see Robert Egert's work. He is grounded in the here and now, with a knowledge that runs through antiquity to contemporary science fiction. I don't want to be too specific, but we can talk about rhizomes, fracking, Pan, the Loreley, Russian cinema, the Golden Age, artificial intelligence and gun control.



Robert Egert • We Need a Working Session
acrylic, dyed glue, tempera on canvas • 30 x 34 • 2015
collection of Sean Briski



Robert Egert • 26 Females
oil on canvas • 28 x 36 • 2015

All kinds of things are in his head when he paints. He thinks a lot when he works. He doesn't make it easy on himself. The arteries that nourish his system can contradict each other, can almost cancel each other out, only to join together to strengthen each other. His work has evolved from narrative to abstract to abstract narrative. It is fluid in an overlapping viscous kind of way.

Robert Egert's fluidity develops from a concept. This is no flimsy use of the word. At Pratt in the seventies we enjoyed a rigorous education in minimalist and conceptual art, both in theory and practice. This underlies Robert Egert's work no matter what it looks like. His early painting moved from constructed spatial objects to new takes on Ovid's Metamorphoses.

In the early 1980s when the East Village was hip and dangerous, I saw his exhibition at Civilian Warfare. His paintings were large oil canvases, vernacular objects floated amidst a color field ground, weird perspectives generated a sense of insecure place. These works referenced the uncertainty of the times, a change in value systems, a world drifting towards an ambivalent future.

Years before artists like Neo Rauch appeared on the scene, Robert Egert was making paintings that collaged the mundane with the historical in a mix that said something about contemporary politics. Manifesting duplicity by referencing nostalgia, his work pinned down the eclecticism of the time, making images that were complex and unapologetic.

Since then Robert Egert's work has evolved to be more pondering, while reductive, dealing with questions that go beyond the contemporary. The years following the heady days of New York in the eighties took him in many directions.

Robert Egert went on to study philosophy and sociology, founded a family, wrote for art journals and has had a good look at corporate America. Inevitably, his approach to painting has become more encompassing as he incorporates experience gained outside the hermetics of the art world. His work revolves around questions like: What is life flow? What is humanity?

The sense of searching to make humanity palpable without obvious visual cues is a quest that Robert Egert has set out upon. When we look at the shapes in his paintings we see patterns interlocking and overlays of color. Sometimes we become aware of a figure. Is it human? Put simply, Egert's paintings can be seen as a cartography of humanity. The body is ephemeral, fleeting and appearing, drifting and separating.



Robert Egert • Exogenesis
dyed glue, oil, acrylic on canvas • 28 x 36 • 2015



Short Palindromic Repetitions
oil on canvas • 24 x 30 • 2015
collection of ethan pettit gallery



Robert Egert • Quarantine Summary
oil on canvas • 22 x 28 • 2015

The interchange of foreground and background is reminiscent of mutating cells. Yet there is also an all-encompassing skin. Is this a view from a petri-dish? Once again we see the flux from macro to micro, an interweaving of space in which scale becomes a nonissue.

If scale is a nonissue, we are directed to specific ideas that are important to Egert by his use of titles. Concepts that Octavia Butler developed in her trilogy "Lilith's Brood" have occupied Egert while completing his most recent work. Writes Egert on his blog, "Her books posit interbreeding between an alien society and humans in the wake of a nuclear holocaust that



Tautology • pigmented glue, crayon, acrylic
on canvas • 24 x 28 • 2015

essentially wipes out humans and destroys the earth. The aliens that come to save the few survivors on earth interbreed to create a new hybrid species.”

Interbreeding, an attempt at rescuing while eliminating the original. All these thoughts connect Robert's new work to his past work in regard to his concerns with dystopian society.

Perhaps we could call Robert Egert's painting contemporary action painting, however not the kind of action painting by which the body directs the artist's movements and marks made on the canvas. In Egert's paintings the gesture is removed from the maker; it becomes a kind of meditative, autonomous painting, a kind of painting that is more related to the European tachism than American action painting.* The German "informel" artist Bernhard Schultze comes to mind with his figures wavering between human and animal forms.

And so we return to the questions one asks oneself when looking at an artwork. When does the decorative become something else? How can an artist translate the complexities of our being into paintings that are not just to be looked at? It comes down to the fact that we understand very little when we first look at an artwork. Therefore, if we see what we know, isn't it better to know a little more? This is what makes us human. Or is it? This is the question that Robert Egert will continue to pose and continue to offer, at least partial, answers to.

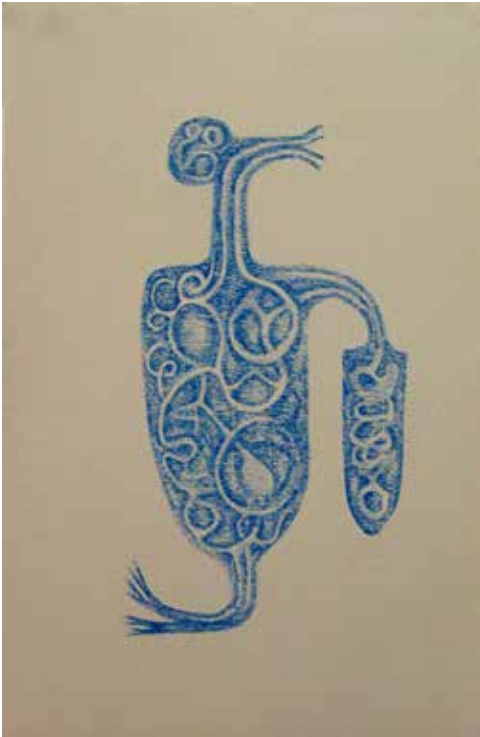
Laura J. Padgett

* Tachism: a style of painting adopted by some French artists around the 1940s, involving dabs or splotches of color, a process of action and reaction.



Robert Egert • We Will Be Reassembling at 5PM
mixed media on canvas • 24 x 32 • 2015
collection of Owen Berkowitz

Laura J. Padgett is an American-born artist, photographer, filmmaker, and educator currently based in Frankfurt/Main, Germany. Since 1991, Padgett's work has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, and her films have been screened at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the House of World Cultures in Berlin, and at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt. Her photography has been widely published. Since 1994, Padgett has held appointments as a lecturer on art theory and criticism at the Bauhaus-Universität in Weimar, the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Offenbach, the Hochschule-Rhein-Main at Wiesbaden, and at Paderborn University. Padgett also writes about film, art, and aesthetic theory. Since 2000 she has been a contributing editor of the film journal *Frauen und Film*.



Two works by Robert Egert not in this show | Pendulum (above) conté on print-making paper • 14 x 21 • 2012 | Knot (below) oil on canvas • 56 x 48 • circa 1986.



Behold. Morphopolis. Transfigured City. Synthetic Turn.

Robert Egert's career coincides with the transfiguration of New York. He and I knew each other in Williamsburg back in the 90s. We renewed our friendship when he joined the gallery three years ago, when we were located in Bushwick. In the intervening years we witnessed the morphopolis, the city that morphs with impunity. The city that swells and balloons with in-filled and up-zoned urbanity.

Though we may decry this event, the early Brooklyn art scene anticipated it. Unwittingly, but certainly, the Brooklyn scene anticipated the hyper-gentrified, neo-liberal accretion that marks our times. For it was a creed of the scene that things should morph. Toward the end of the last century, when "downtown" migrated to Brooklyn, the mode of artistic production began to shift as well. The postmodern art of the 1980s gave way to the unearthly formalism of Brooklyn in the 1990s.

The "immersive" environments of the warehouses as well as a recrudescence of abstraction in the plastic arts were emblematic of Brooklyn art. And this was an art given to formal inventiveness, to transforming space, to unknown instead of known culture. It was a "synthetic mode of production," as distinct from the "analytic" mode of the 1980s that was as yet more astringent, allegorical, and seated in a downtown avant-garde of a hundred years standing.

We might call it "the synthetic turn." And in its enthusiasm for synthesis, for the breeding of forms and systems, Brooklyn art comported with the transformation of the borough, guided it even, lent to it a utopian zeal, even as the art itself struggled to stay in Brooklyn..

Hence the morphopolitan experience that gives the name to our show. Robert Egert's career spans the whole of it. He began as an exemplary East Village painter, with the keen reflexive instincts of that school. Those instincts, analytic in nature, in time found expression in singular shapes that are redolent of the synthoid moment of Brooklyn. His is a rare and vital passage to which people have tended to pay attention. Robert Egert is a draw, of that there is no doubt, and for that we are lucky to have him on board. He resonates with a generation that belongs to the morphopolis.

Ethan Pettit



10 Eighth Avenue | Suite 3 | BKNY | 347 578 3041
Open Saturdays and Sundays 1-6 pm

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