

Susan Eley

Fine Art

Ted Dixon

Eighteen



Susan Eley Fine Art, Hudson

August 22—October 13, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 7, 5-7PM

Susan Eley Fine Art is delighted to debut a groundbreaking series of abstract paintings by Ted Dixon in the solo exhibition *Eighteen*. The presentation *Eighteen* will be on view in Hudson from August 22-October 13, 2024, with an Artist Reception on Saturday, September 7, 5-7PM. Ted Dixon will also be the subject of a talk for The Hudson Eye on Thursday, August 29th at 7:30PM. This talk will be moderated by editor and curator Taliesin Thomas from *Hyperallergic* and the executive director and chief curator of the The West Harlem Art Fund Savona Bailey-McClain. The Hudson Eye is an annual arts festival known for featuring artists such as David Hammons and Jennie C. Jones, from video and performance to outdoor sculpture and traditional painting.

This suite of artworks expands upon Dixon's unwavering commitment to the possibilities and power of abstraction. *Eighteen* features recent paintings inspired by his reading of *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, a book developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones. The texts reframe US history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans as central to the national narrative. The contributing writers encompass an array of thinkers—journalists, artists, academics, anthropologists, historians and legal scholars. Thus, the collection provides a rich scholarly picture for reader—and viewer—engagement.

The 1619 Project is a Pulitzer Prize winning book published in partnership with *The New York Times* in 2019. Within this powerful tome, there are 18 essays covering a variety of themes. The topics highlight many aspects of the Black experience in America—including “Punishment,” “Fear,” “Citizenship,” “Self-Defense,” “Church” and “Music.” In this series, Dixon uses these themes as a

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catalyst for his abstract painting practice. Each painting corresponds to one of the 18 chapters and encapsulates Dixon's responses to the texts. The paintings are intuitive and aligned with the artist's life experiences as a Black man, resulting in both emotive translations and emblems reflective on past and present.



The 1619 Project exposes an alternate lens upon American history, thereby challenging standard interpretations of various aspects of cultural and political institutions. Dixon's visual responses take a look through this lens—reliving and reimagining a collective trauma. He acknowledges the atrocities that have happened in the United State's founding and nation building in order to transcend these nefarious histories. Dixon arrives at a point that balances a reckoning of the past and a promise of hope for the future. Through his embrace of abstraction—his freedom to interpret colors and construct shapes—his paintings allow him to recognize pain, but not to be defined by it.



Dixon creates paintings that connect to place and time. His moods and emotions act as filters in the painting process, resulting in canvases with energetic shapes and striking colors. Dixon especially enjoys combining lines and circles, exploring both visual and thematic tensions and harmonies within the same painting. The artist states that “the most challenging moments of a painting are often the most pleasing.” In this way, the artist is able to craft multilayered compositions that delight the eye and fulfill the viewer's yearning for complexity and intrigue, while simultaneously expressing a visual interpretation of history.

In *Eighteen*, Dixon crafts, plays and manipulates form, line and color to find where the three fuse. While Dixon's practice has been influenced by the traditions of Abstract Expressionism, he pushes to create compositions that reflect his personal aesthetics and messages in richly layered acrylic renderings. They are created through a labored process of layering, removing and reworking paint. Dixon's linear structures are overlaid with circles, ovals, X's and conical forms. In *Eighteen* particularly, stripes and stars are inverted and recolored as his reinterpretations of the American flag. Perhaps a result of responding to written histories, in this series Dixon incorporates more representational elements than in previous work. In *Punishment* audiences see a bloodied figure

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interpreted through the artist's Color Field-esque abstraction. *Church* provides a colorful and homey visage, while darker under layers peek through. His lines are strong, and textures and pigments are the reigning elements. Registers of color and symbolism repeat throughout the series, harkening to ancient traditions of visual storytelling.

Dixon embodies the concept of Black Joy as he reflects on this book through his paintings. As defined by the National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Black Joy demonstrates that internal responses are fully within a person's control. They have the power to restrict access to their spirits, emotions and the source of their joy. It is a well-spring of power that is uplifting and life-affirming." Dixon's abstractions allow viewers to explore a truthful and nuanced picture of the past and present—but also future potentials.



Why do you paint?

"I paint to express myself and to create an experience—to have a dialogue where the viewer feels safe to open up. I paint to add value to my existence, in not taking for granted the people who love me—I want to provide them with something more."

Why abstraction?

"Because it is where we find the strongest connections."

Why interpret The 1619 Project specifically for this series? What does the book do for you?

"Though I am not a historian, I am aware of American history...especially as it pertains to Black people. So, I knew that reading *The 1619 Project* would be a challenge. I was ready to be angry, but you have to pick your poison. Because of the content and the emotions, there were two periods where I had to stop painting to regain my 'creative' strength. How I experienced these texts while painting, it was not poison. It's an elixir. For me, there is always a twinkle of hope to be found in everything."

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How do you get to the hope and that positive mentality when dealing with these subjects?

“There is an upside to be found in everything. That is the way life is. More good than bad, more joyous than sad. I start with believing that the opposite of that would be terrible; it would drain you.

The premise that there is always something to be learned, that there is some joy here.”

“I want to enhance my efforts to not let the history hold me back. And through my paintings, inspire us all to move in positive directions. The moon has two sides, you know...you can see it from the sunny side or the dark side. Our perceptions may be different but always consider that it is still the moon.”

Press Release Text by Liz Lorenz, SEFA Assistant Director
With Quotes by Ted Dixon, Artist

Ted Dixon

Biography:

Born in New York City in 1953, Ted Dixon has lived in the Hudson Valley since 1992 and since 2009 has lived in Rosendale, NY. The artist attended Fordham University, the Fashion Institute of Technology and School of Visual Arts. He worked for over 25 years as a web designer, and in 2009 began devoting himself full time to his artistic practice. Dixon's previous exhibitions have included Montgomery Row Art Space, Rhinebeck NY; Woodstock Artists Association & Museum, Woodstock NY; ADS Gallery, Newburgh NY; Arts Society of Kingston, Kingston NY; Gallery at the Rosendale Theatre, Rosendale NY and Albany Center Gallery, Albany NY. *Diametric Abstraction* was Dixon's first exhibition at Susan Eley Fine Art. He continues to work with SEFA as a represented artist.

Artist Statement:

When working in the studio, I am trying to capture a moment in time that has a certain feeling and meaning. I have a particular interest in what enables and stimulates artistic expression.

How do we learn to see what we cannot yet see? What are the things that influence our ability to perceive? My paintings can be described as abstract compositions influenced by personal experiences and efforts to capture moments in time.

As the second child of seven, my idea of less being less and more being more has always been relative. My work reflects the investment in the belief that less is more. And in today's world of visual and verbal overload, I attempt to send the viewer on a journey of discovery and clarity across the painted surface.

I hope the viewer experiences "abstract" sensations—finding quiet, serenity, restlessness or tension. My goal is to create images that speak to a point in time that someone will embrace, be moved by and cannot live without.