



Mark & Elena Erickson Paintings The Markella Project

Looking at the paintings of Mark & Elena Erickson is an experience in color and movement. Bright areas of pigment slash across a brilliant background or float above expansive landscapes. The viewer is gripped by an immediate and powerful response to the sheer explosion of color and the substance of the paint itself. In their relationship, both in marriage and their lives working together in the studio is a true collaborative spirit. Working together and separate in their large painting space, each helping the other in thought and deed. In early 2020 the times were right for true collaborative spirit to awaken. Steady work in the studio commenced and The Markella Project was born. Collaboration and solo work in painting, collages and writing/poetry were undertaken. Like none other before, the year brought an unique concentration and a sense of discovery.

A quote by one of Mark Erickson's painting professors stated, "My paintings are intended to be additions to rather than reflections upon life." Hassel Smith may have meant to push his students to continue in the long tradition of putting paint on canvas. The paintings that Mark & Elena Erickson produce are interpretations of this same abstract language refined to high eloquence. A mid career, disciplined painter, Erickson offers an approach to abstraction in his paintings that have the essential elements of harmony, light and contrast. Elena's paintings match the intensity and startling colors, as they both keep their sights on new images and inspirations.

Their work originated in theory from Abstract Expressionism, where in the mid 20th Century, a groundbreaking revolution in American art became a rich tradition and point of departure for Mark and Elena's work. Influences of painters of the 1950s are evident in their work, yet the direction is their own, clearly felt as the paintings breathe the fresh air of contemporary thought.

The Dutch-American painter William DeKooning once noted that all paintings are in the long run either *landscapes*, *portraits* or *still lifes*. The Ericksons' paintings are decidedly abstracted *landscapes*, but the terrain traveled is sometimes uncharted and is as internal as it is external.

Mark Erickson was born in Hollywood, California. His early education was completed in California, Germany and Italy. He is a product of his experience on both continents and a family history combining the traditions of East Coast aestheticism and Wild West freedom. Mark completed his art training at the San Francisco Academy of Art and the San Francisco Art Institute. Another of Mark's painting instructors, Sam Tchakalian stated in class, trying to intimidate/motivate his students and lead them to a higher reasoning in the true understanding of painting, "You have to have conviction, paint as if it means everything, the rest is bullshit."

Mark's Mother Bernice Lane and Grandmother Blanche Rose were New York City painters. They studied under Hans Hoffman and knew Franz Kline and other City artists before and after World War II. Erickson's Father Ernest Anders was a jet aircraft designer and pilot, his Grandfather Frank Severin was a Dakota cowboy, Dam Builder and a Railroad Marshal in the Oregon Territory. He served as a Runner/Rifleman with the famed 308th Infantry in France in the 'Lost Battalion' during World War I.

Often Mark's paintings have an urban energy with whirring colors flying across a brightly lit metropolis. The shapes, so perfectly formed, propel the pigment off the surface of the canvas. Erickson, transforming the flat plane, breathes

life and depth into his paintings and pulls the viewer into the experience. He does this by modulating color against color and form against form in such a way that you feel you can travel within the work. It is easy to see his quick progression in experimenting with differing aesthetic issues and emerging with his own very original and individual voice.

Elena's initial direction and interest in art making originated in analog photography. Carrying her Canon camera everywhere she went and setting up a darkroom in her apartment bathroom in Basel, Switzerland. Moving later to the San Francisco Bay Area in California, Elena started studying abstract painting with her husband Mark, an established painter himself. That enriching background enabled her to find her own style of painting. Through trial and error, the painting techniques developed quickly until she found something that was her. Elena's paintings revolve around color, design, fabric and nature.

Elena often starts a new creation with small color studies on paper. Their assistance in her larger paintings on canvas is vast. Exploring colors, hues and shades and how they affect each other is at the core of her approach to painting. Color theory is an important part of the process in creating these large canvases. As Elena states: "Brush work is essential, the details are carefully shaped and manipulated as I proceed. It takes steady hands and an awareness and sensitivity for the desired lines I seek." Playing with reflections, mixing paint and exploring colors, her goal is to attempt and capture a static energy in her canvases.

Often working side by side with her husband in their studios in Oakland and Venice, California, the work space can be a source of inspiration. On a beautiful day sunlight pours through a twenty foot wall of windows, enabling experimentation with light and paint, casting shadows and silhouettes on the walls.

Elena Erickson is quoted as saying:

"While painting I often feel that confidence is an essential part of my artistic process, specifically how the work has evolved over the years. The more natural the movement, the more natural the look of the surface becomes. It's a journey through various colors and shapes, inspirations and observations, where I can pick the areas that speak to me the most, and put them together in the search of harmony. It's important to work in a concentrated direction on the painting before me, so the desired image can come forth in a natural way. I strongly believe that there is always something blossoming from something else that hovers in our consciousness, and following those directions of your own light, will cast new shadows along the way. Ultimately it's important to remember to have fun and to enjoy the flow of color. Art history is important to me, and I've read countless art biographies/books on art history, and I continue in that direction, attempting to push the past forward in my work. Delving into previous art movements, the lives and experiences of other artists inspires me in my own painting."

Mercury Series - Mark Erickson

Illumination floats against the imaginary black as coal galaxy. Influenced by the flat colors and text balloons of comic books, the paint is peeled back from the inside and split down the middle as you might attempt separating a piece of paper through to the center of its core. I exaggerate the effect, creating a composition that overtakes the imagery. I dramatize the aerial feeling/floating effect, letting them shine in an eye popping arena before the black plane. The surface is as smooth, as sliding your fingers along the cool metal skin of stainless steel. A shared passion for the Mercury space program with my Father Ernest Anders Erickson, an Air Corps bomber pilot during the Second World War and recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, was the doorway to the series. During the design of the Mercury spacecraft my father worked as a stress analyst and later was chosen to work with the top-secret division of Lockheed Aircraft and their Skunk Works Project. The Mercury Series features bright organic shapes, that hover weightlessly over a field of black, subtly suggesting figures and objects floating in the dark, the still expanse of space.



Wild Mercury Plains - 60" x 50" - canvas



Hightower & Munich - 48" x 36" - steel/wood/panels

Windows In Motion Series - Elena Erickson

There is a pure energy, intense colors and sunlight shooting through the Windows in Motion paintings. Like reflections forming when looking out a train window as it passes a myriad of shapes and impressions, creating light shards and images through the cut glass. Or they can be viewed as through a Cathedral stained glass window, with backlit outlines dancing in the skylights. One can also find elements of nature. Growing up in the countryside, spending countless hours in the forest and the farmlands, nature was and is a big influence in my painting. Shapes of leaves and foliage, light fractions and glimmers from the distant trees become noticeable. Then later as the city became part of my life, an Urban atmosphere takes hold, a film-like vision unfolds when taking the streetcar or subway across town. Imagery rattling by, impressions entering the mind, creating yet another story line. As this train moves in motion you can look out the window and enjoy the steady flow of images passing.



Setting Suns - 46" x 36" - canvas



Blast I & II - 46" x 75" (both) - 46" x 36" (each) - canvas

Color & Revision Series - Mark Erickson

My work can be viewed as traditional abstract painting, but others see pure abstraction mixing with imagery. I slip in humorous aspects, cartoonish shapes & landscapes enabling me to have freedom to experiment with paint, collage and drawing. My interests in literature, history and music are incorporated to their fullest potential in my paintings. In the series 'Color & Revision,' one witnesses scurrying images & resurrected ideas. Notations of the present lead to each new canvas & in that I can find how past efforts can create new works that are exciting to me and the collector. I want viewers to see things, experience a moment in my painting where their imagination can take off in new directions. Whether it's an illusion of depth, something lyrical or the impact of color and shape, I seek to keep the eye moving around the canvas. Collage elements are sometimes added to take the painting into another arena. The need to feel something that may not be there at first glance, but to know it is there is the key.



The Coast Is Clear – 30" x 60" - canvas

Expansion in Motion Series - Elena Erickson

I have been actively exploring the series called 'Expansion in Motion'. These works radiate an openness and a feeling of expansion. With that thought, the shapes, outlines and silhouettes unfold, stretch and overlay across the entire canvas surface in a continuous pattern. Some aspects of my thought process while creating these works go back to my appreciation of Matisse's fabric and tapestry designs and his unique influences on painting. I often lean towards vivid color combinations in my choice of how to lay out the compositions. Each painting leads the eye to multiple perspectives and color stimulation, both in hypnotic variations and simple recognizable images. One can view the outlines and silhouettes expanding in a muralistic decoration, as if a landscape seen from a distance. Static energy pulsates off the canvas as the explosive colors dance rhythmically to their own expression. Each individual canvas becomes an interwoven story of color and impact.



Sunsplash – 52” x 44” - canvas



The Shelter of Leaves – 44” x 52” - canvas

MARK ERICKSON

Born in Hollywood, California
Studios in Oakland & Venice, CA

MFA Painting – San Francisco Art Institute
BFA Painting – San Francisco Art Institute
University of San Francisco, CA
San Francisco Art Academy
Munich, Germany Military School

ELENA ERICKSON

Born in Safenwil, Switzerland
Studios in Oakland & Venice, CA

Apprenticeship / Degree in Fashion Retailing & Design - Olten, Switzerland
Apprenticeship In Studio Arts, Painting & History - New York City, New York



Scenes From A Train Window I & II – 52” x 132” (both) – 52” x 64” (each) - canvas