



DON EDDY



HIGHER

By David C. Graves

New Work by Don Eddy / at Nancy Hoffman Gallery

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Don says it all has to do with experience.

I say roller coasters also have something to do with it.



Ride the Dragon

2021, acrylic on panel, 42 x 38 inches

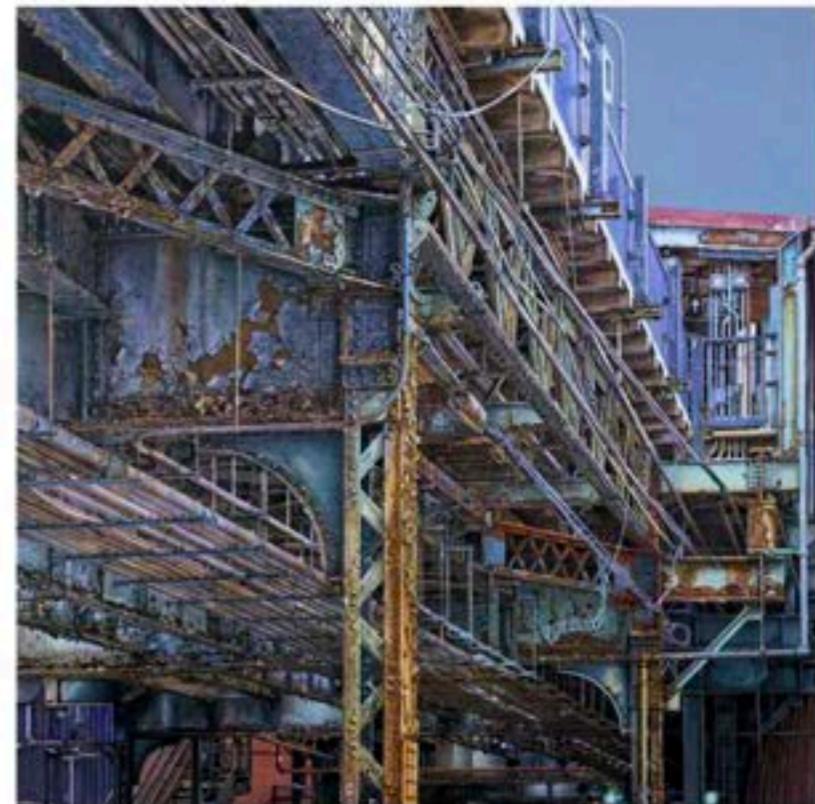


Well, how does one paint experience? Consider Don's *Daughter Light, Daughter Bright*. Engage. Like a six-year-old kid, visiting Coney Island for the first time. Holding your Dad's hand, you walk in through the pinwheel gates, with Paul's Daughter's restaurant on one side and Coney Cones on the other. You watch as the fat guy holding up a burger on the rooftop of the restaurant passes by on your right. You wonder if the burger is any good. Maybe later your Dad will get you one. Burger guy, presumably Paul, gives way to presumably his daughter, offering us a mug of beer. You wonder what beer tastes like. Maybe your Dad will let you have a sip this time. A new ride called 'Clockworkz' just opened, and as you wait in line there's some debate as to whether you meet the height requirements. You look up at Clockworkz, a massive Goliath standing 33 feet in the air, decked out in red, blue and gold. With its rotating hands and swiveling pods, it looks like a cross between the Jolly Green Giant's hippie grandfather clock and the Grand Wizard of Androids. It is all a bit overwhelming.

Daughter Light/Daughter Bright

2020, acrylic on wood panel, 59 x 32 inches

One might think that by painting a picture of *what* was experienced, the experience would be captured. In other words, if one painted an exact enough representation of Clockworkz (as Don *appears* to have done in the top panel of ‘*Daughter Light, Daughter Bright*’), then the experience of it would be triggered in the viewer. Alas, it does not work that way. A well-crafted photograph might be able to do something similar to that, as in fondly perusing through one’s vacation photos: “Oh look, remember Clockworkz just opened? And you had to argue with the operator whether I was tall enough to get on?” That, however, is to elicit a *memory* of the experience. I do not think this is what Don is about, when he talks about experience.



Metal City Suspended

2020, acrylic on wood panel, 42 x 20 inches



WAA IX

2022, acrylic on panel, 9 x 12 inches

I have always understood that Don Eddy does not really paint things. Of course, he has crafted images of Volkswagens, shoes and their reflections in the store window, silverware and glassware in display cases, and multi-panel paintings of so many different things that he hoped it would stop me from dimwittedly listing them here. Still, he doesn't paint things, he doesn't even think about the things when he's painting, and he does not want us viewers to think that those things constitute the "meaning" of his works.

"Look, it's a roller coaster." *Obviously*, it's a roller coaster, but that's not the point. I used to think that the point was in the experiences themselves. I used to think (all of four years ago) that Don would paint from his own life experiences and then we, the viewers, would engage and start a dialogue which would generate the meaning of the work. I even wrote it in Don's last catalogue.

“As we engage,” I wrote, “our images, our materials, the substances of our lives are mixed into the fray. We must infuse the paintings with *our experiences* so as to get them to live.”

In significant respects, I still believe this position to be true enough. However, it is *still* not Don’s bottom line. Don’s digging deeper. One of the main reasons why I love art and philosophy so, is because in both realms, the deeper you go, the higher you get. In this essay I would like to make a few explanatory comments on how Don Eddy’s art takes one higher.

If my intuition serves me, Don is talking about being aware of ‘experiencing’ itself, and not so much about what we are experiencing. Experiencing experience, if you will. As real-time experience is to actually live a life in this world, then contemplating what is actually involved in experience is to contemplate the very substance of our lives.

Drive She Said

2022, acrylic on panel, 33 x 20 inches





It is a rare occasion when that occurs, but Don believes that art can facilitate such occurrences. Indeed, one's successful engagement with a fine work of art is in itself a rare occasion. In the engagement with a fine work of art we are afforded the possibility of examining (or at least seeing something of) the way we experience our lives. We experience the "world" of the artwork. It "speaks" to us, and we "identify" with something about it. We experience the work of art, whilst contemplating the way it makes us feel, the way(s) we experience it.

WAA XII

2022, acrylic on panel, 14 x 11 inches

This comes about in art because we are engaging with an artifact that we know is not real, but it has certain qualities that make us experience it as if real. In painting, for instance, the painting looks real (what we usually mean when we say it looks like a photograph). In literature the people in the story talk and behave as do real people in a real community. The “world” of the novel behaves as does a real world. A good novel draws us in, and we identify with what’s going on in the world of the novel. At the same time, we are external to the novel, and we pause and ponder how we feel about this. Similarly, a good realist painting draws us in, with its own unique brand of trans-substantiation, where paint on panel becomes iron gridwork holding the Queensboro Bridge aloft. What is it about the image that makes it look so real? What is it that draws us in?



Metal City II

2022, acrylic on panel, 38 x 38 inches



When I engage with a painting, I know what I'm looking at. I am not some bird pecking at Zeuxis' bloody grapes.¹

¹ Zeuxis of Heraclea was a Greek painter in the 5th century BCE and became famous for his ability to imitate nature; myth has it that he painted a bunch of grapes so realistic that birds flew down to peck at the image.

And yet, on a visit to the Prado in Madrid, my eye caught a spunky little still-life by Juan de Espinoza, entitled *Still Life with Dead Bird* (1651). Indeed, there's a dead bird in the lower right-hand corner, but in the middle hangs a perfect bunch of fresh green grapes. Damned if I didn't cock my head at them and coo like a pushy little pigeon. Those grapes enthralled me. They were so lifelike, so fresh, so firm, my mind went off in a dozen different directions, while orbiting those colors, lights and shades, highlights, tonal shifts and masterly brushstrokes.

Morning to Night I

2021, acrylic on panel, 33 x 20 inches

As I thought of a wondrous variety of *things*, like grapes, birds, Zurbaran, and ancient Greek legends, so I conjured up past experiences of *qualities*, like the transparency of grape skin, the bubbly effect of the cluster, the voluptuous fullness of the berries, my mind was busy thinking, feeling, sensing, remembering, and wondering. All the while, my conscious being experiencing, *and being aware of experiencing*, a crafted image. I found it *compelling*.

Don's images compel me in that way.



WAA XIII

2022, acrylic on panel, 11 x 14 inches

Initially, one can understand this compulsion as ‘a clear feeling of *rightness*’. Imagine that you are placing a new armchair in your living room; You put the armchair in one place and it’s “Eh”, but a foot to the left and it just *looks right*. I cannot defend the suggestion here, but here’s a thought for consideration: such cases have to do with logic. Not necessarily the high-falutin’ logic running super-computers, but ordinary everyday logic, as ‘that which makes sense’. Anything that makes sense has a logic to it. (In fact, it is the particular logic of the thing *that* makes sense).

WAA VIII

2022, acrylic on panel, 12 x 9 inches





If you have furnished your living room thoughtfully and purposefully, then there most probably is a logic to it. It could be a functional kind of logic, where one of the various functions of the living room, like seating, watching TV, entertaining, is the main consideration behind decisions of what goes where. The logic could be one of space economy, if the home is rather small. It could be *feng shui*. Whatever the case, your living room makes sense (at least to you), it is not arranged arbitrarily. In fact, anything that appears to be arranged in a non-arbitrary fashion, exhibits its internal logic to us. We examine it, trying to figure it out, getting it to make sense.

Without Stopping IV (B)

2022, acrylic on panel, 44 x 14 inches

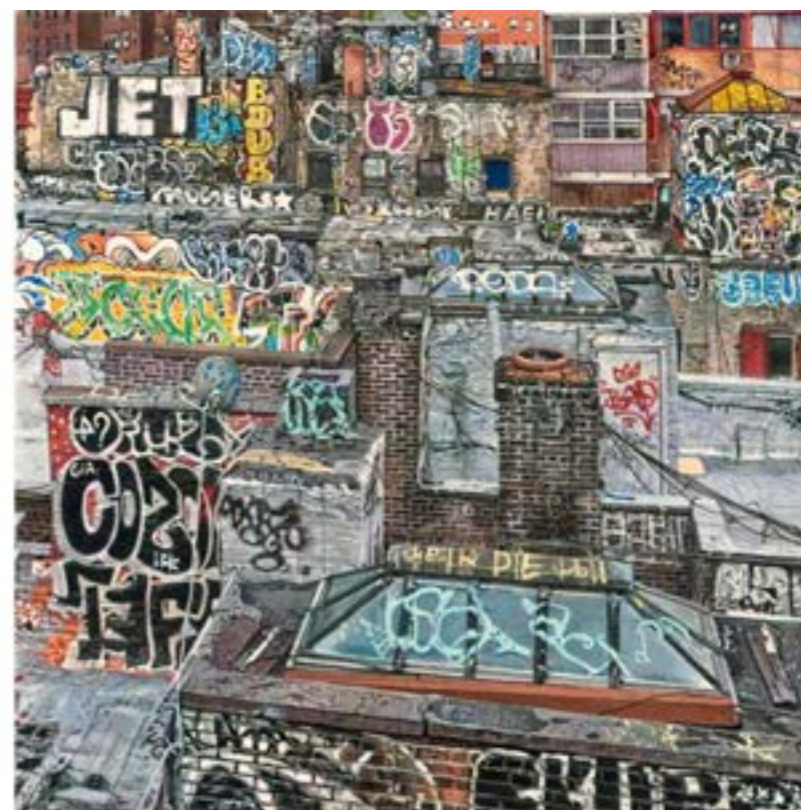
Making sense of your living room's layout can be a daunting task. Sometimes you need to bring in a professional. That means that this logic of which I speak is not necessarily a personal thing, it is not idiosyncratic. Other people can see it, too. In fact, if it is an instance of something with which a lot of people are familiar, then the logic of that something is more or less discernable to all of them. Like a basketball game. If a player makes a brilliant move, the crowd rises to its feet as one in solid cheers. What makes for "a brilliant move"?



Study in Gray

2022, acrylic on panel, 16 x 20 inches

Not necessarily a move which clinches victory, for the team may lose the game, and still all would agree that the move in question was brilliant. The move was brilliant because it made perfect sense in the particular context of that game. It was just the right thing to do, so much so, that we get excited when we see such things. How is it, then, that virtually everybody watching the game thinks that this move was ‘right’?



Sea Side Swing

2022, acrylic on panel, 16 x 33 inches

Because it was in accord with the logic of the game, and everybody watching the game is (more or less) familiar with that logic and can see the “rightness”. It is as if they all say “Well, given that this and this was the situation, then such and such was the right thing to do”. Otherwise, the game would make no sense to them, and they wouldn’t be watching, let alone feeling compelled to jump for joy.



Logic is uniquely compelling. If Albert is taller than Betty and Betty is taller than Chris, then Albert is taller than Chris. Not only is it true that Albert is taller than Chris in such a case, but it *must be* so.

Compelling. Logic *is* the mind telling you when something *must be* right. How? By making sense. (More specifically, by telling you that “if such and such is the case, then so and so must follow”, as in the example above.) The logic of your living room’s layout compelled you to put the armchair right there, and the logic of a basketball game compelled the fan to jump with joy.

WAA XI

2022, acrylic on panel, 12 x 12 inches

To be clear: This “logic” of which I speak is *an intuitive affair!* It isn’t something one formally works out on paper, it is something one *feels*. Don’s works of art (indeed, all good works of art) are compelling in this way. The good work of art is such that nothing in it is arbitrary, no aspect of it is superfluous. This means the work manifests and exhibits a clear logic of its own, (what the ancient Greeks called ‘unity’). In general, Don Eddy’s art, over the years, has clearly exhibited its own logic. Don’s overarching logic is, roughly speaking, one of clarity by way of intensification. (I tried to flesh this out a bit in my aforementioned essay from his 2020 exhibition).



WAA X

2022, acrylic on panel, 9 x 12 inches



Don often pushes colors to their chromatic limit. He compresses space, such that near and far are awarded equal clarity, as are real objects and reflections. Even when the object being rendered is splashy of its own nature, like water, then that chaotic splashiness is rendered with perfect clarity. Don's works are so meticulously contemplated and crafted, with nothing, but nothing left to chance, his works reek of the power of their own logic. That is why they are compelling. For my part, I simply have to look at them, and I nod my head muttering to myself: "Yep, nailed it."

What is it that Don nails, when he "nails it"? Don creates images of things which are familiar (more or less) to a lot of people. Volkswagens, window displays, glassware, water, scenes of NYC, amusement parks, Don faces off with fragments of reality throughout.

WAA VII

2022, acrylic on panel, 12 x 9 inches

When I see a painting of (among other things) a roller coaster, like *Machines at Play II*, I try to figure it out. I try to make sense of it. Not in the conceptual sense of “I love roller coasters, always have...! Ah, the memories...”. That kind of attitude is much too shallow, compared to the depths one could achieve doing it Don’s way, (which mainly involves shutting up and looking).

When I see a painting of a roller coaster, along with my experience of roller coasters and all things contingently related, you can be sure that my notion of ‘*the logic of roller coasters*’ is up and running.



MAP II

2023, acrylic on panel, 16 x 20 inches



MAP III

2023, acrylic on panel, 16 x 20 inches

I know very well that the image of a roller coaster with which I am engaged is one processed by the life-experience of an artist, but I am trying to make sense of it. I am trying to get *it*, Don's painting. So I run what I see in the painting up against my personal experience, but also up against 'the logic of roller coasters'. Those two aspects of my engagement are crucial: my experience of roller coasters and the logic of roller coasters. And they are different, even if they both exist in my mind. The former is *about* me, the latter is *about* roller coasters. The first is about *my* world, the second is about *the* world.

When Don paints a roller coaster that looks as real as any a coaster one has ever seen, it is because he is making sense of roller coasters. He also has "a logic of roller coasters" in his mind, somehow.



MAP I

2023, acrylic on panel, 16 x 16 inches

And, since Don's paintings of roller coasters are exceptionally good, that means that I see, rather clearly, Don's sense of the roller coaster. I see "the logic of Don's roller coasters".²

² "The logic of Don's roller coaster" is so powerful that it virtually kicked me in the face the first time I saw it. That happened in late 2022 at Nancy Hoffman's gallery. Nancy graciously brought out Don's *DLDB* and other works for me to preview. I remember being engulfed by the over-the-top hard candy blues, reds and yellows, the rhythms pinned down by the grids, the Wonderland memory of a child entering the Luna Park for the first time... *DLDB* took my breath away. It made *complete* sense, in a manner that very few experiences in life can afford. I thank Nancy for her gracious hospitality. Another outstanding instance where Don "nailed it", to my mind, is *MAP II*.

So, we have, as Don wants, a dialogue going on between Don's logic of roller coasters and my logic of roller coasters. Don's experience, Don's world interacting with my experience, my world, through the work of art. But what about *the* world? In this case, what about the roller coaster?

Don would probably like for it all to be about experience. I think roller coasters have something to do with it. I think the world has something to do with it. I think colors, surfaces, reflections and spaces have something to do with it. I think the way Volkswagens are put together has something to do with it. I think the over-the-top lushness of Coney Island and the strobe-light precision of the ironwork on the Queensboro Bridge have something to do with it. Such aspects are aspects *of reality*, just as much as they are aspects of our experiences of them. I do not believe they are *just* our experiences, for then I do not think that they would be able to *compel* us the way Don's works do. What I have been trying to argue here is that when art goes after roller coasters, it goes for something deeper than the mere representation of the roller coaster. It goes for the logic of roller coasters. That which is sensibly *right* about roller coasters.

Thus:

When art goes after reality, it goes for something deeper than the mere representation of fact. Art goes for the very *logic of reality*.



Three Sisters

2023, acrylic on canvas, 59 x 44 inches



WAA VI

2022, acrylic on canvas, 12 x 9 inches

Art is not satisfied with telling us what *happens to be true*, it seems that most of science does that. Art yearns to show us, in a sense, what *must be true* in the world.³

³ I think that this is what Aristotle had in mind when he said that the truths of art are deeper than the truths of history. In a famous argument between Plato and his pupil Aristotle, Plato regarded art that “imitates” reality to be a deceptive lie, whereas Aristotle thought that art need not deal with the facts, because the truths of art are deeper than the truth of mere facts (in *Poetics* c. 335 B.C.).

Consider such cases as Michelangelo’s *David* as it presents us with a real, in-marble embodied ideal of body and soul. I doubt there is a single factual aspect of Michelangelo’s *David* which is true of the Biblical David. “Not very realistic,” one might say. However, if one’s world-view was *idealistic*, as it was in 14th century Italy, then Michelangelo’s *David* is the closest thing to the truth anyone has ever produced.



Water and Light

2023, acrylic on panel, 36 x 50 inches

Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* as a celebration of individuality, exhibiting its "each person is a world unto himself" logic, is such a case. As is Picasso's *Guernica* as an indictment of war. Such masterpieces are not trying to tell us that "this is what happened", they are trying to tell us "this is the way these things work in the world", or "this is the logic of these sorts of things". "This is the way these things work in the world" is a peek behind the curtain. It tries to show us *rhyme and reason* of what experience is experience of. In such a manner, art takes us "higher".

I do believe that we *generate* meaning. I can see how the meaning of a work of art is indeed generated by the polylogue between artist, viewer and image, as Don maintains. We need but to add the fourth element of the interaction – reality – so as to generate a *truly* meaningful experience, not only of our own experiences, and not only of the crafted images of those experiences, but also of the higher aspects of reality that these images address. These higher aspects of the world are *logical* aspects, *sense-making aspects*, which outrun an otherwise mundane reality.

Some call these aspects metaphysical, some call them magical, some call them “hyper” or “intense”. It is an affair of respect, humility and desire. And what “keeps it real”, as a younger generation once used to say, is the integrity of artist, viewer and image in their dealings with reality. As art offers us its engagement, we become as lovers, truly art lovers. At its best, art sweeps us away to a reality that is higher. The facts are happenstance. I cannot look at Don Eddy’s *DLDB* and say, “Yes, that’s exactly what it looks like”, because I have never seen Clockworkz, nor have I ever been to Coney Island. But I know amusement parks, their roller coasters and rides, and the heartfelt place they occupy in my world. Don’s paintings, however, show me more than the role amusement parks and their rides play in *his* world, they show me something about the heartfelt place roller coasters and amusement parks (and all the rest) occupy in *the* world. So I engage with Don’s *DLDB* and I say to myself, “Oh yeah, that’s what roller coasters are all about”.

Nailed it.

Tel Aviv Summer 2023



Without Stopping IV

2022, acrylic on canvas, 37 x 44 inches