

# ABSTRACTIONS OF LIGHT

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## CHRISTIAN ECKART

“My artistic project has as its focus an examination of the economies of paradigmatic abstraction in the 20th century. My interest is in the depiction and expression of transcendentalist and spiritualist themes since the beginning of the Renaissance.”

Originally from Western Canada, Christian Eckart has been living in New York since 1984. Growing up in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies in Calgary, he remembers feeling overwhelmed and engrossed by the seemingly infinite scale of the sky and land. This informed an existential sensibility has become a major factor in his thought and production.

In 1984 he graduated from The Alberta College of Art in Sculpture. During his studies there he had three solo and numerous group exhibitions and was named to the board of directors of the city's local artist run gallery.

Immediately upon graduating, Christian Eckart moved to New York where he completed a Master's Degree in Painting in 1986 at Hunter College with Robert Morris as his principle instructor and graduate advisor.

Since 1986 Christian Eckart has had over 60 solo exhibitions in private and public galleries and museums and has participated in approximately 150 group exhibitions. In 1996 a ten-year survey of his work was organized by Professor Mark Cheetham of the University of Western Ontario, accompanied by a comprehensive exhibition catalogue. The exhibition traveled to six museums across Canada over a two-year period. In 2000 Christian Eckart co-curated and was included in the major museum exhibition “Faith: The Impact of Judeo-Christian Religion on Art at the Millennium” presented at The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield Connecticut.

Christian Eckart's work is represented in many important private and public permanent collections including those of The Guggenheim Museum, N.Y., The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., The New York Public Library, The Chicago Art Institute, The Detroit Institute of Art, The Museum of Fine Art, Houston, Texas, Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna, Austria, Musee d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, France, The Australian National Gallery,

The Eli Broad and Eli Broad Family Foundations, Santa Monica, California as well as many others throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

Christian Eckart is best known for his Andachtsbild, Eidolon, White Painting and Icon- Type series. They all employ, to some extent, some of the materials and techniques traditional in religious

artworks since the beginning of the Renaissance. In these works gilded mouldings and panels in configurations that recall altarpieces, cruciforms and so forth were presented in combination with contemporary materials such as plexiglass, formica and industrial paints.

However, his focus in recent years has been on other hyper-realized paintings generally made from aluminum and hand-polished automobile lacquer. Series such as the Sacra Conversazione Paintings, Regular Paintings, Zootrope Paintings and Curved Monochrome Paintings are made in this way. The actual paint process used in these works is one developed by Rolls Royce early in the 20th century and based on the techniques of Chinese Lacquer Ware.

The palette, in some way, always indexes, discloses and/or builds upon iconic and emblematic colors or combinations of colors formalized in religious painting of the Renaissance, Baroque and beyond.

Christian Eckart utilizes all of the above-mentioned materials and techniques in the realization of his work not only to insure production of an object of beauty, quality and high craft but also to provide a link between our historical period and the cultural production of the past. Although the works exhibit sculptural characteristics they are specifically related to painting and are intended to provoke responses relative to fundamental issues regarding painting's condition and its historical relationship to transcendental themes. However minimalist in their aesthetic, Christian Eckart's "paintings" achieve an erotic presence through voluptuous proportions and the fetishism of their manufacture and finish.

Working in multiple and overlapping series Christian Eckart is motivated by two principle agendas. On the one hand he has an intellectual and philosophical regime that deals with the theoretical/critical/interrogative implications of his meta-paintings\* and their relationship to the spiritualist motivations of certain traditions in the canon of Western Art. (\*Literally: an of-painting or an about-painting. Meta-paintings are a distinct class of paintings originating in Late Baroque Northern Europe and are generally understood as works that overtly exhibit aspects of self-consciousness regarding their nature as artificial constructs, plastic images, etc. Magritte's "C'nest Pas Une Pipe" is a well known example of this type.) But more importantly, on the other hand, is his desire to resolve those concerns with a body of works that convey and project qualities, properties and/or values of beauty, elegance, grace, simplicity, calm, sensuality, etc. Working in the terrain of what he refers to as the "Post-Romantic Sublime"

Christian Eckart's works deal with and embody the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in problems concerning representations of the unrepresentable, ineffable and unknowable. As such they focus on the concept of "Nothing" and/or "The Void" as primary and fundamental cultural constructions of the 20th and 21st centuries. He has thereby, for his own expressive needs, reconfigured some of the tropes of Modernist abstraction through a synthesis and superimposition of both Western religious art and Eastern metaphysical imperatives. Despite this extremely abstract subject matter Christian Eckart's choice to engage these concerns in the form of a hyper-materialized painting-object allows him to bridge the space of the sacred with that of the real.