

# Eric Goldstein: On Kinetic Energy, Landscapes and Light

Eric Goldstein paints abstracted landscapes that focus on the kinetic energy of light and its interaction with the equally kinetic properties of the physical world. I use the term “paint” rather loosely here as Eric’s art involves an intricate process of incorporating paint, thread, plaster, and various metal foils onto his support medium. Each of his pieces encompasses multiple views and psychological perspectives of a particular landscape experienced over time. The end result is an abstracted view of nature that favours line over form.

Eric’s body of work has a way of prompting me to contemplate questions pertaining to physics. When I first encountered his oeuvre, I happened to be reading Brian Greene’s *The Fabric of the Cosmos* and I associated Eric’s threads with String Theory. These days, when I look at his work, I find myself mulling over an unresolved question about the properties of light: particle or wave? This is my private trip. Yours might be different.

When asked what his work is about, Mr. Goldstein will want to talk to you about the kinetic energy of all things that make up a landscape – first, of light acting on matter, but also wind and gravity and the resulting patterns of motion of these kinetic forces on nature experienced over time.

While all this sounds pretty trippy (and it is), the good news is that Eric is a warm human being who has the ability to talk about all of this in an affable, soulful and totally user friendly way...

**Eric Goldstein**

*Forest Path*

mixed media







*Jonathan: Eric, tell me how an active cinematographer with a full work schedule ends up producing these incredibly intricate abstract pieces in his private studio? Your credentials as a Director of Photography make it clear that you're already accomplished in that field. What motivated you to branch out into the plastic arts? What is the ethos behind this endeavor? While you're at it, tell me about how you arrived at this very distinct aesthetic in your art...*

**Eric:** Yes, it is challenging to do them both. It has been imperative that my studio be at my home so that I can work on my canvases whenever possible.

When employed as a cinematographer in town, I try to put aside at least 30 minutes a day to work on my canvases. Each piece is very labor intensive and because I can only get a short time with each, they take several months to complete. Then when I'm between gigs as a cinematographer, I approach my art with a disciplined work ethic. It's a balancing act that is really very fulfilling.

As to the 'ethos' of my work – somewhere along the way, I realized that I've chosen a career path as a cinematographer in order to make a living but that I'm a creative thinker, artist if you will, because I was born that way. While cinematography has the lure of artistry, it is the craft of the thing that takes priority over self-expression. And yes, it is a very creative job with a lot of creative problem solving going on, but in the end I am hired to time-manage a film crew and to create the images that in turn will be used to build someone else's narrative.

I best equate what I do as a cinematographer with what a building contractor is to an architect. Of course, as with any ensemble endeavor, politics can also take precedence over the art. As a painter, (for lack of a better term, since I don't paint but build my canvases) I am on my own. I find that painting requires a deeper engagement with my world and a more profound understanding of myself.

Eric Goldstein

NOVEMBER

mixed media, 32 x 42 in.

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Eric Goldstein

*Rage and Control*

mixed media, 32 x 72 in.

That said, I have always held these two sides of my life separately. As a self-expressive plastic artist, I have dabbled in metal sculpture, paints, ceramic, photography and furniture design with a modicum of success and an ambitious career path. But, as I said, I've kept this separate from my job as a cinematographer, sort of like a stepchild you are embarrassed about.

But about 6 years ago, I wanted to find a way to bridge this schism. I began exploring what I actually did as a cinematographer and what I did as a self-expression artist. As a cinematographer I am asked to create the appropriate "emotional feeling" with light. In other words, if the film is a romantic comedy then everyone is always softly and beautifully illuminated and if it's a suspenseful drama or horror genre it's always dark and moody.

I am also asked to keep the camera moving to give the film kinetic energy. So in my private enterprise as a plastic artist, I set off to discover how to create a canvas (a single frame) that did what I did as a cinematographer; that is to say, building "emotional narratives with kinetic energy". The more I explored my craft the more conceptual my canvases became. Concepts like how each canvas should be in the same aspect ratio as a motion picture frame: 1 to 1.78. Each string, like a single digital pixel, will make up an image. Each canvas will be both precisely measured and also full of happenstance randomness. And the list goes on.

You asked about how I arrived at this very distinct aesthetic in my art. Humorously, I admit that I went to art school and studied all the major artists from Raphael to Rothko, but it was by watching my 9 year old daughter Savannah working out a school project using string that gave me the first idea for my mediums of choice.

*Jonathan: I love that you developed an amazing technique from your daughter's art project. Kids are awesome that way. I've got two boys - my eldest just turned four and my youngest is one and a half. They've got a Kandinsky/Pollock thing going on. You know you're doing alright creatively if you can learn from what your kid is up to. What was the first piece you executed in this manner?*

**Eric:** I believe my first piece in this style was "9:30 Rain".



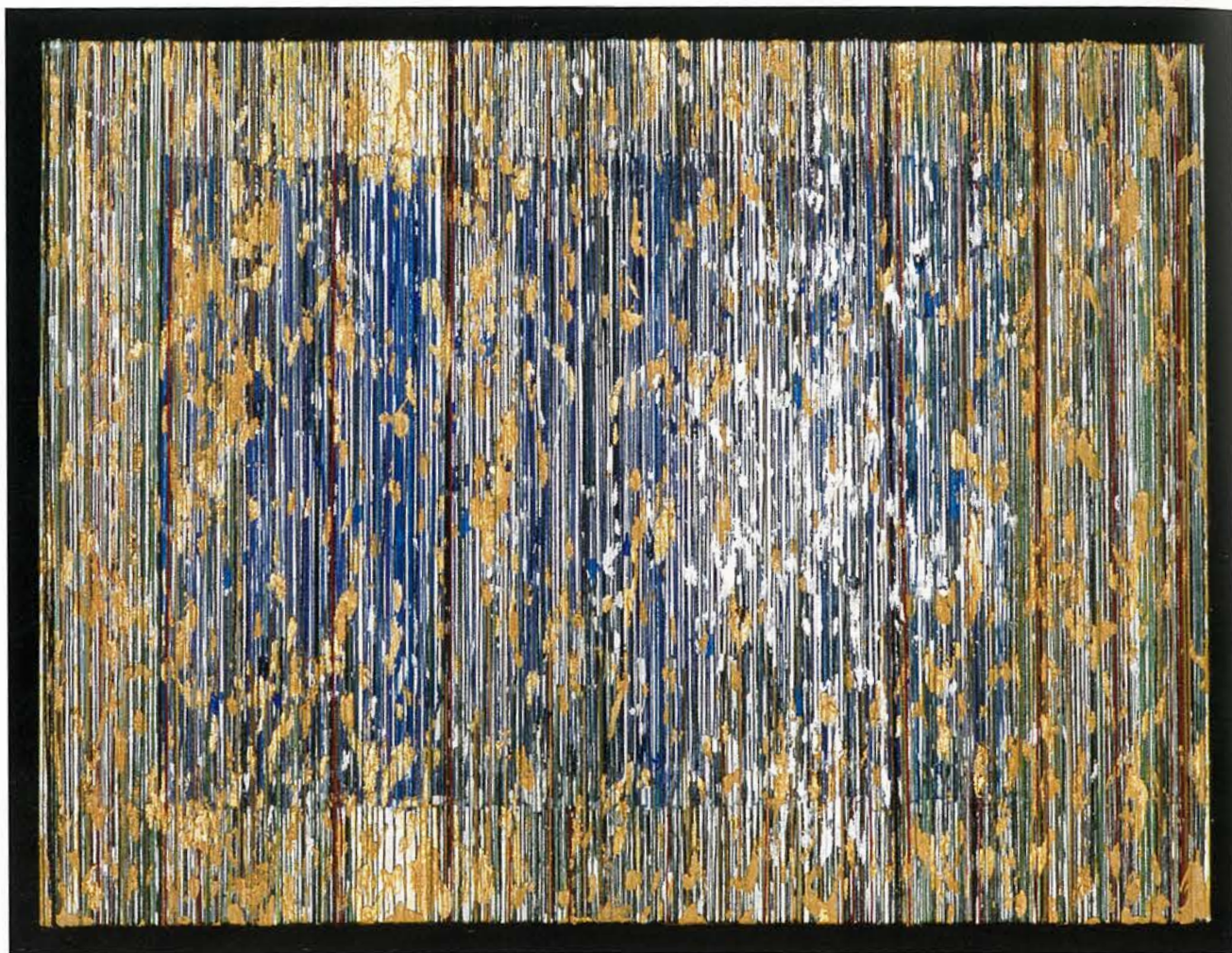


**Eric Goldstein**

*9:30 Rain*

mix media, 32 x 42 in.





Eric Goldstein

*A Glimpse of The Sea*

mixed media, 32 x 42 in.

*Jonathan: Tell me more about the technique that you incorporate across the board in your oeuvre: you incorporate colourful strings, plaster, paint and other materials like bits of aluminum onto your canvas, correct? How do you work these elements into a coherent whole? How premeditated is each piece? There seems to be a balance between planning and improvisation. The results are pretty spectacular though, especially when one views the work in high resolution. There is so much nuance and texture going on!*

**Eric:** I like to work with contradictions and juxtapositions, so I'm not surprised that some of the works' power comes from the dichotomy between careful planning and improvisation. When it comes to that balance, each piece has a life of its own.

I like to think of that balance as imagining and then discovering. I have had the most success when I start with a premeditated idea.



I create a script of a kind, where I begin with a subject or object and I'll do several ruler type drawings on graph paper, I'll make notes in the margins describing the thoughts or feelings I want to express when I'm viewing the object/subject and I will decide before hand on what materials I'll work with for each piece.

Usually the materials are somehow connected to the subject either by color or texture. I will discern some essential feature from my subject and incorporate it architecturally a little bit like a cubist painter might. I will try to articulate its geographic nature with straight lines, a schoolbook example of this is to use thinner lines closer together to create a distant perspective like a horizon line, or a repeating pattern of lines to create movement. I will do all this before I start and then allow for the discovery by improvising. However, if I improvise too much I end up removing much of my work with harmful effects.

Here is an example of what my sketch notes would look like: "Appear and disappear"; "blinding sunset"; "boat crash at night". I have a piece entitled "Night Passage". The 'passage' part comes from the name of an island, Passage Island, just off the shore of the Vancouver shoreline. The piece tells the story of how at a certain time of day, the island – enveloped by the intense setting sunlight shimmering on the water – disappears from sight only to reappear as a shadow in the night.

It is important to add that it is not important to me that the audience understands the story but only that they are captivated by something going on with it. I like to use gold, aluminum or silver leaf to articulate the idea of light or reflectance. I collage organic threads such as cotton and wool, because synthetic thread will melt or warp when the final varnish is applied. I started working upon stretched cotton canvas but I have switched to wood backed panels for the simple fact that some of my materials are not very pliable and will crack when flexed.

I work with my canvas frames flat. I then build a form and apply either cement, wood panel, resin and then remove the form.

After that, I start to glue the threads with an acrylic medium. I measure each thread on the edge of the frame to ensure its straightness and create its pattern much the way a musician would work with measure.

**Eric Goldstein**

*Old Trellis Fence*

mixed media, 32 x 42 in.

I manhandle my canvases, turning them around and around, working from different angles. I then take the piece outside and drop plaster or cement mixed with acrylic medium from high above on ladders which gives the piece a feeling of randomness and then take it back inside and layer more measured thread on top.

Funny... the piece I used in the video demonstration on my website video was an example of a piece that I didn't really have a clear understanding of what I wanted. I believe it was more about the process.

**Jonathan:** *In your artistic statement, you mention that your aim (and I quote) is to create "order out of visual chaos by distilling the basic elements of color, texture and line from the landscapes of my world, my abstract canvases endeavor to portray nature in motion, not as nature appears but as nature feels." That's a rather profound and noble goal. Can you elaborate on that?*

**Eric:** Are you sure I said it like that? No wonder it sounds so noble!

For me, cinematography has always been a truly renaissance art that requires the alchemy of science, math, history, technical skills and creativity to distill order out of visual chaos. But as a painter, by distilling the basic elements of color, texture and line from the landscapes of my world, my constructed canvases embrace nature's chaos and endeavor to portray nature not as it appears, but as it feels: unspoken, indescribable and sometimes chaotic.

Let me try to explain the differences as I see it.

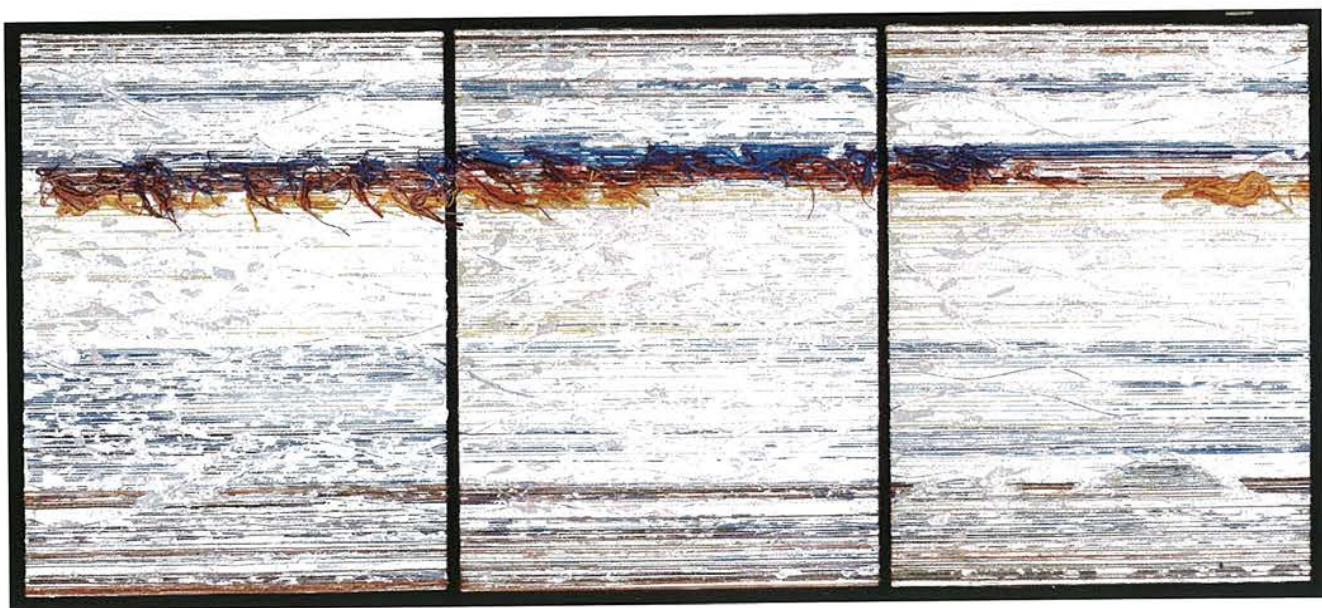
To make even the simplest motion picture well, it takes a colossal amount of collaborative thought, preparation and human energy... so much so that it takes a multitude of people to accomplish the task. Their efforts are done both separately and in concert with each other. Sometimes in a linear progression, other times simultaneously and sometimes a combination of both. These efforts seldom stay in the same order as the narrative progression of the script and frequently the picture comes together only at the very last moment. The business of making a film is truly very chaotic. In the production phase, it is only the moment when everyone's random efforts get funneled through the lens and captured by the camera that the chaos becomes distilled and a visual order is established for the audience to experience.

**Eric Goldstein**

*Howe Sound*

mixed media, Triptych 40 x 90 in.









Now, with my constructed frames, I look towards the natural world through a different lens and my aim is to express what I see as visual chaos. I will observe the random beauty of light dancing through a hole in an old trellis fence, or I'll notice the chaos that the sunlight makes flickering at the end of a forest path with all its random flora colors and I'll distil from such a scene the basic elements of perspective, line, color, texture and of course, movement. So to that end, my constructed frames remove nature's visual order, celebrating instead its sublime visual chaos. My goal is to capture nature not as it objectively appears but rather how it feels to experience it.

Another way of thinking about my work is to meditate upon the fact that nature is not always as it appears. Critical thinking and unconscious emotions play a big part in how we see nature. When Picasso said "I paint objects as I think of them, not as I see them", I believe that he was saying that he intellectualizes the subject without the affects of feeling emotions. By distilling or extracting the basic elements of color, texture, movement and line from the landscapes of my world, my abstract frames portray nature's sublime order, not as 'I think of them' but as it emotionally feels: unspoken, indescribable and sometimes chaotic. That is what I mean when I describe my work as "emotional narratives with kinetic energy."



*Jonathan: You mentioned that when Picasso said “I paint objects as I think of them, not as I see them”, his goal was to intellectualize the subject without the affects of feeling emotions. Is that really possible? Can we seriously entertain the notion that Picasso’s highly subjective deconstruction of objects (including people, which Picasso liked to objectify) was emotion free? At any rate, it seems to me that the best art – and I’ll include your output in this assessment – is produced as a fruitful by-product of thinking and feeling – more specifically, thinking about feelings and the things that elicit them. Can you elaborate on this interesting tension between thinking and feeling in art and how that relates back to your own output?*

**Eric:** Any tension between whether or not ‘thinking’ or ‘feeling’ is better when it comes to art is quickly lost in semantics. I would agree with you that for art to be successful, it must give birth to something even greater than just a typical cerebral and emotional reaction. It must evoke the whole of human experience. At best, those reactions could be “unspoken, indescribable and sometimes chaotic”.

My impulse to quote Picasso I guess is too tempting! So even though I cannot (in good conscience) begin to explain what was in Picasso’s iconoclastic mind when I quoted him, I was implying that he was trying to use only a new analytical approach to depict his subjects in an effort to come up with new innovative ways of seeing things. Perhaps he was just being reactionary to the status quo conventions of the European art that preceded him.

Here’s the crucial point though: by objectively deconstructing his subjects into basic elements like shapes and lines and then repeating and rearranging them as he did, I believe he ultimately intended to capture the truer essences of his subjects.

That is to say, ones that contained cerebral and emotional components as well as their kinetic energy within the picture frame: multiple perspectives and what have you.

So in that vein, I too, to some extent, use the same cubist process to elicit a greater emotional context. Instead of just portraying a subject, I am trying to communicate a collection of thoughts, a narrative of sorts, which express my experience with that subject over time.

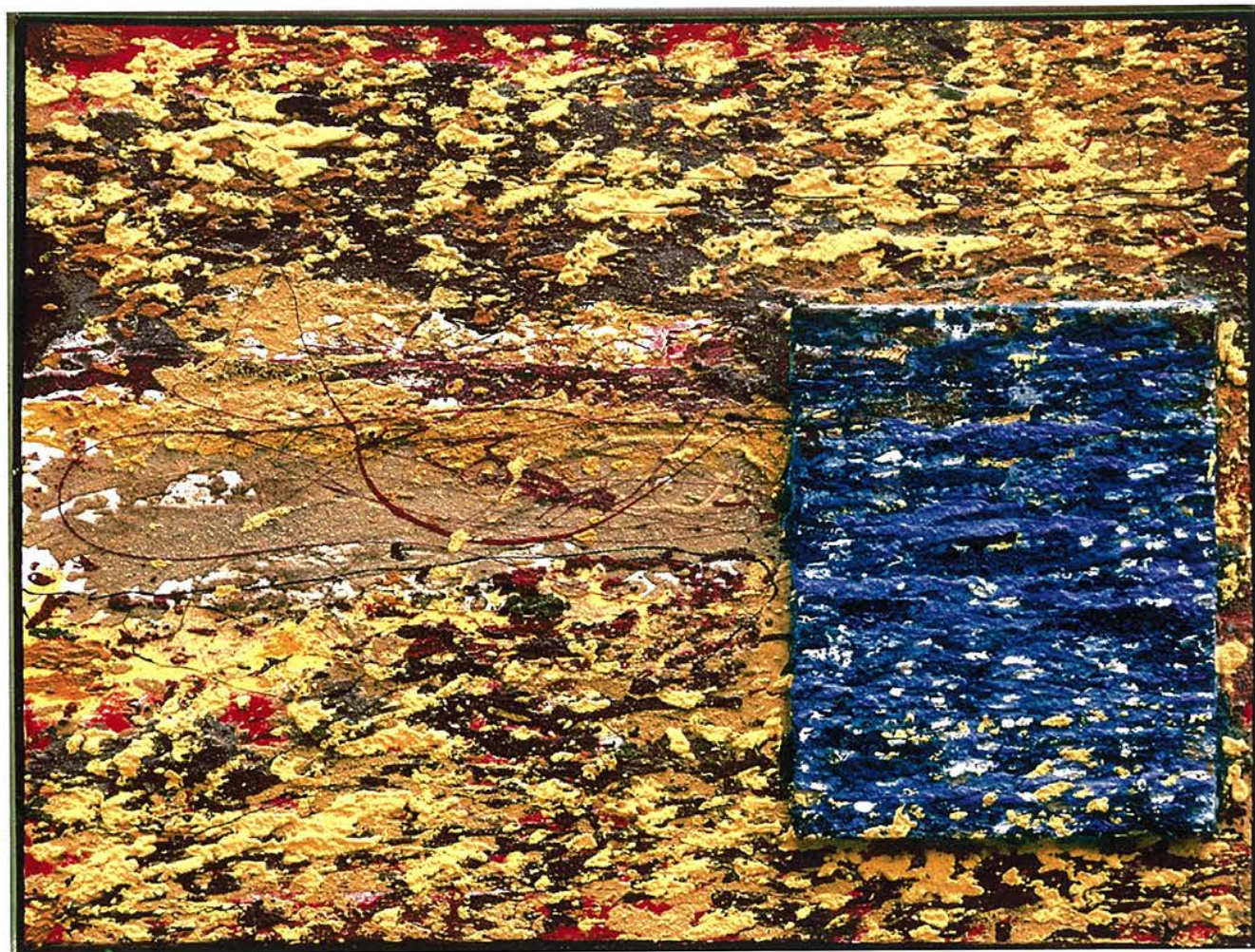
I use colored threads and paint to express an arrangement of connected thoughts that speaks of what it is I have experienced. For example, with "Forest Path", the flowers did not dot the landscape with color the same time as the setting sun created visual chaos at the end of the path. But over time I have experienced both on that path. In that way, "Forest Path" is a narrative. It is a story about what I observed and what I have taken away from that path over a period of time.

I use an analytical process to deconstruct and then rearrange a multitude of elements to hopefully capture an emotional experience or an essence. All my work reflects this process in some way. Again, it is the same processes that I use as a cinematographer. As I mentioned, even though my work is conceptual, it is not important to me that the audience understands the narrative or the concepts but only that they are captivated by something going on within the frame.

*Jonathan: I'd like to ask you about four pieces that seem to veer away from your preferred methodology. With "Portrait of a Room", the thread as a medium (while still present) is de-emphasized and in "Winter Water" you introduce sand and discard the threads altogether. Be that as it may, these two pieces retain a geometric, controlled composition that ties them to your larger body of work... not so with "Rage and Control" and "Night Reflections". Those are far looser. In "Rage and Control" you utilize wire very differently than you normally use the threads. You seem to be experimenting in these pieces... the title "Rage and Control" seems to imply something beyond re-interpreting external stimuli.*

**Eric:** You have a discerning eye. Indeed, these four paintings are from a much earlier time than the present incarnation of my work. It is not that I have veered away from my present concepts but what these paintings show is the progression I have made to this new level of work. I can see some of my initial concepts taking shape in these earlier pieces. These paintings were the more successful pieces from the past that made the cut for my web site.





Eric Goldstein

*Portrait of a Room*

mixed media, 32 x 42 in.



In "Portrait of a Room", my last piece in this style, I used the similar theme of distilling the basic elements, this time from my home's living room, and re-organized them to create this abstract expression. The blue square is the window that looks out to the water and the paint mixed with sand evoke the colors of the walls and furniture. .

"Rage and Control" was painted back in 1992 and was a good example of how I used dichotomy in my work back then. The explosive splash of red juxtaposed against the perfectly measured yellow square emblematically expressed the frustration in my personal and professional life at the time. I'm not surprised that you sensed that it came from a more internal place for my self-expression.

*Jonathan: You're aesthetic program being so unique, I am curious about your influences. Every artist has a few... I see a kinship between you and Kazuo Nakamura. He was one of the members of the Canadian abstract group called "Painters 11" back in the 1950s and 60s... Like you, his work is refined, restrained and his lines and forms rigorously abstract. For a certain period in the 1950s, he also incorporated string into his compositions. But that's my association... I'm curious about yours. Aside from a flash of insight upon encountering your daughter's art project and your "day job" as a cinematographer, what are your influences as an artist?*

**Eric:** It is easy to see the post modernist/abstract expressionist movement influencing my work. Artists like de Kooning, Pollock, Albers, Rothko, and Kandinsky to name the obvious, have all in some way spoken to me through their work. When I'm struggling with a piece I will often look at Rothko's work and contemplate why his paintings are so powerful to me and then try to emulate what works. But I like to think that his and the others' influences are derived more from their exemplary craftsmanship and artistic integrity than their work directly. No matter how gifted they were, their accomplishments were the result of discipline and hard work. For me, that is the corner stone of successful art.

Like the work program of many of the abstract expressionists, my work is a process of self-discovery. It's a conversation that I have with myself about the depths to which I can understand something and my relationship to it.



Yes, I listen to my influences (and I'm easily swayed), but it will be my ability to listen to myself that something bigger than myself will come; something worth saying and hopefully worth listening to.

In the meanwhile, I will stay open to being influenced and inspired by anything that is well crafted and I am not above making use of a good idea when I see one (for instance, from my 9 year old daughter).

**Jonathan:** *Tell me, considering that you've created an amazing and coherent body of work working in the manner we've been discussing, what are your plans for the future? Based on what you've said so far, it seems that your unique work program still has a lot to offer you (not to mention us viewers)... You seem to be in full stride and I'm getting a sense that there's still plenty of things in your world to deconstruct in this matter. Any thoughts on this?*

**Eric:** There is always a plethora of things to deconstruct; the challenge will be in what to do with all the ensuing chaos! For now, I'm hoping that I'm on a worthy pursuit with these constructed canvases. I hope I can continue to discover things hitherto unforeseen, consequential or perhaps eloquent, one frame at a time.

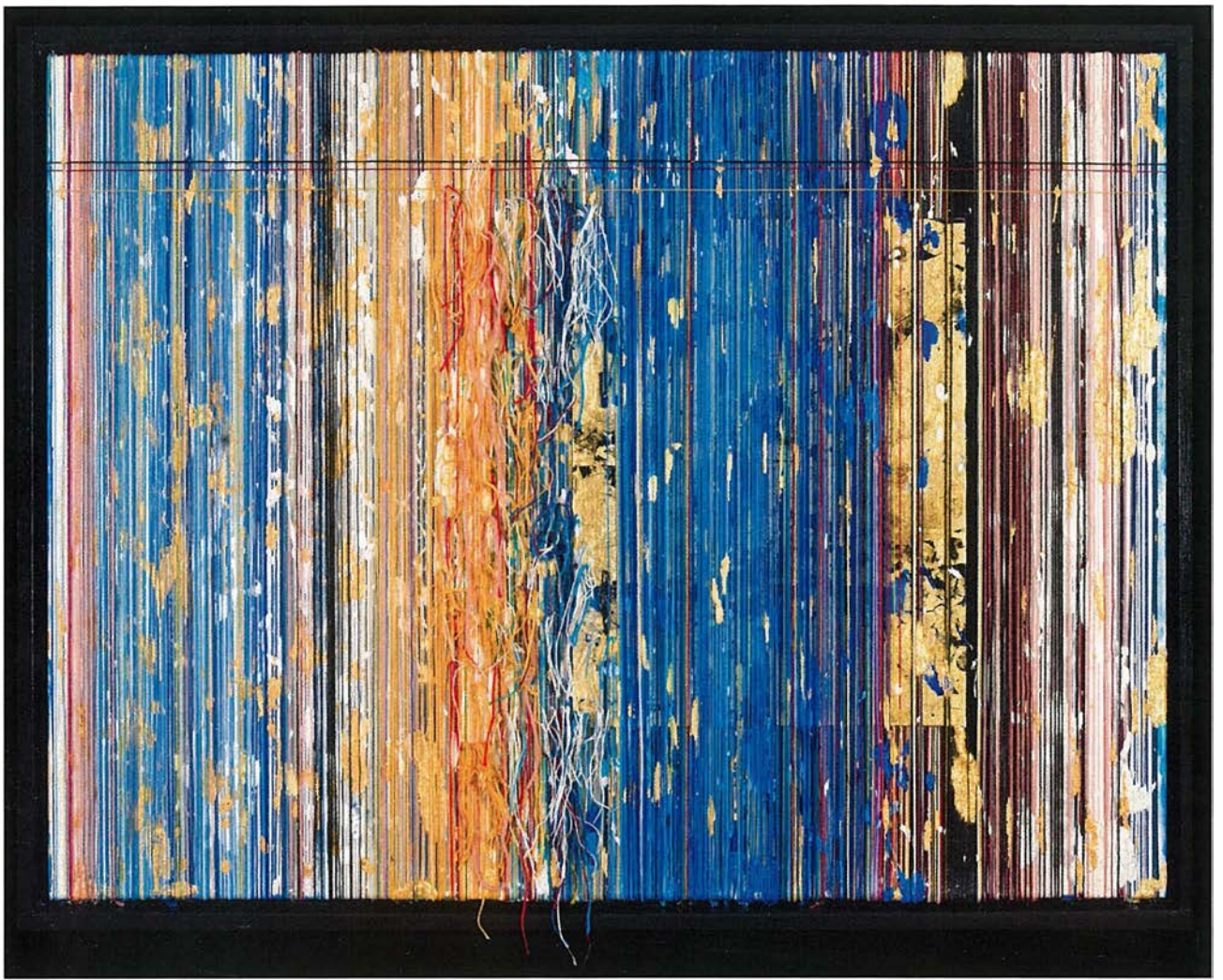
**Eric Goldstein**

*The Forest for the Trees*  
mixed media, 32 x 42 in.



*Eric Goldstein*





**Eric Goldstein**

*Breaking*

mixed medium



*Jonathan: I love how each of your pieces encompasses multiple views and psychological perspectives of a particular landscape experienced over time into one piece. You've generously broken that down for us in this interview...You also mentioned on a few occasions that while this analytical process of deconstructing and re-arranging in order to arrive at the essence of whatever has captured your attention and is basically what informs your work. You don't care whether or not people see or understand your work in those terms. In other words, you are happy to set your art free in the world and let viewers experience it in their own way. I guess that open ended relationship with the audience is required for abstract artists. What are some of the more memorable interpretations of your work? Does this type of feedback transform the way you look at your own art? As an abstract artist, tell me about the bridge between what these pieces mean to you and what they mean to people who are fortunate enough to view them... about that wonderful place called "shared meaning"...*

**Eric:** I like to say that I make art because it's so much cheaper than psychotherapy. I say it humorously but the underlining truth is that for me, being creative is undeniably a therapeutic process that assuages some internal turmoil and provides me with a cathartic sense of purpose. I would say that this is not unique to me but instead a historically similar internal motive shared by many artists.

Earlier in our discussion, I likened my creative process to a journey of self-discovery... a conversation with myself and in doing so, I tried to imply that the process of creating the work is more rewarding than the artwork itself. I say that because I've discovered that any artistry reflected in my work comes from intuition and that my ability to converse with that intuition is honed and advanced by constantly working at it. In short, the more I work on the art, the better I get to know myself and the world around me.

Since it is not the artwork itself but rather the contemplative process that is important to me, I find that I can easily let go of any attachments I have to my work when I sense that I've done all that I can and I'm at the end of my journey.

It doesn't matter what I put into the piece, or better yet, what I got out of the piece, the work does not belong to me anymore. I can set it free.

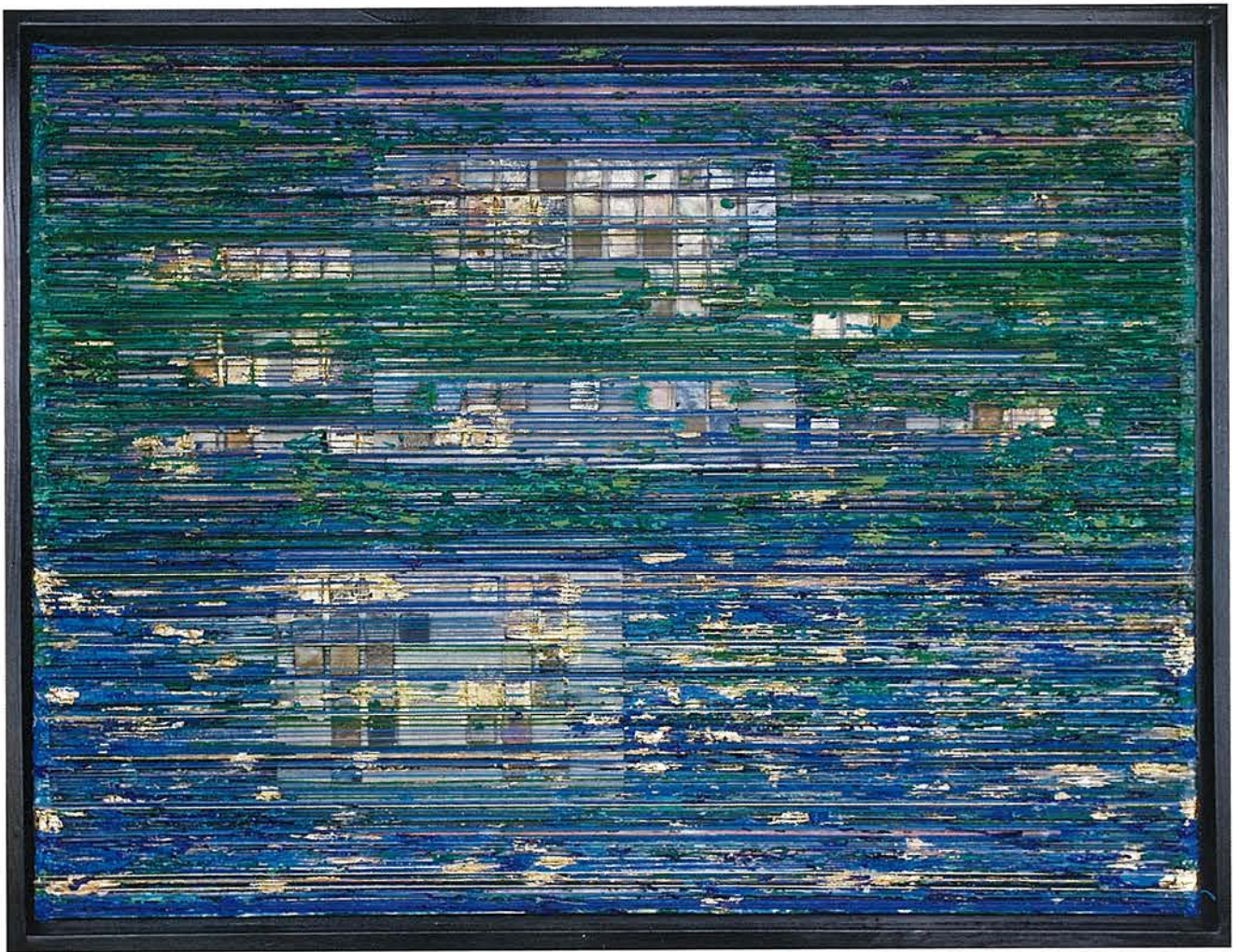
This is not to say that the audience's interpretation does not matter to me. While it may not be imperative that the audience understands all the explorations I made with my cinematography concepts or that they see the multiple views over time as I saw it, I am still very much trying to communicate and elicit an appropriate emotional response in the viewer.

In other words, my aim is to instil in others an emotional impression of my subject and it is my hope that the audience gets a sense of what it is I've tried to capture without necessarily knowing my process.

My work is highly personal but not precious. The work is in no way political, nor is there a message in the medium; it is enough that my work be visually pleasing and emotionally provoking. I am just as happy if someone buys my work because the colors match their decor as I am if they appreciated its subtle narrative. I work hard to make each piece archival and every one a good long term investment.

That said, when I do hear related back to me what I had intended to express, well... this is possibly the 'shared meaning' you speak about. When this happens, I am always pleasantly surprised and quietly satisfied that I'm on my way to inventing a visual language. After all, that is what both cinematographers and artists do; communicate visually.





**Eric Goldstein**  
*View of the Bay*  
mixed medium