



TOM LIEBER

TIME TO BONEUP ON THE AMERICAN PAINTER

By **GEORGE WAYNE**

If – and when Eric Clapton, that iconic music dude..... That Roll and Roll-Hall-of-Fame–thrice-annointed-legend.

If Sir Eric...wait a minute...”Geez Louise, did Queen Elizabeth ever grant him knighthood? Who knows. Ask “Alexa” to tell you that fact. But if – Eric Clapton – ever decides to finesse, to develop, his own permanent home for his art collection somewhere chic such as the beautiful West Indian island of Antigua where he has already contributed in amazing ways.

When Eric Clapton creates his personal art gallery, the artist Tom Lieber will command major presence. After all, after knowing what I know, we can

all now surmise that Tom Lieber is Eric Clapton’s favorite artist.

“Eric once told me that my paintings inspire his playing,” the artist has said. Not that he is one to brag and boast and hoist his own petard. But then again, Tom Lieber was born in 1949.

This abstract art painter has never been on relevant and buzzed about.

His career found very early patronage from the prestigious National Endowment for the Arts in 1975. Within days the now Hawaii-based painter offer his next big reveal. Brand new work shipped all the way from Kauai to Soho. {Georges Berges

Gallery 462 West Broadway- May thru June 2018}

“It’s all about paint and energy,” the artist quipped recently. And, so, here is more of the TL rather salient answers to the questions from GW.

GEORGE WAYNE - Tom Lieber your art has homes in the Solomon Guggenheim Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art- two of the worlds iconic museums! To also mention the San Francisco Museum of Art and MOCA {Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles}, And of course, the many homes of your friend Eric Clapton. Has it sunk in yet? You are more than ever-- a bona-fide modern day artist worth every collectors

investment. It sank in 30 years ago and continues to this day. My friendship and discussions with Diane Waldman, curator at the Guggenheim at the time, were of equal importance. Diane studied and knew Rothko, Joesph Cornell, de Kooning, Phillip Guston and Roy Lichtenstein, among others. Her stories and insights were inspiring. And when William Lieberman (no relation) purchased a Lieber for the Met, it was an honor and very exciting. John Berggruen even took me for lunch to tell me the news. I was young (34), it was a big deal to me and a statement of support and confidence for the work.

What is a typical working day like in the life of Tom Lieber. Run your daily work ethic by GW. Is it first rolling some fine Hawaiian cannabis sativa after your lunch of quinoa and painting away by the surf and sand in Hawaii where you live? I usually wake up around 3am to paint after I throw all the bikini clad women out of the house. Then I make coffee, turn all the lights on to let the Hawaiian spirits know I’m up, and walk 15 feet to my studio and work until 8am. The most precise and focused painting events happen in that time. And then I do my Astanga Yoga at 8:30 and then work in my garden, on my house/studio and do art maintenance stuff..... supplies, phone calls, etc..... I love Hawaii and feel grateful to be able to work and live here. It’s endlessly beautiful here.

Where in Hawaii do you live? And why there? I’ve visited Kauai every year since 1976. I live in an organic farming area called Moloaa on the north-side.. And moved here in 2000 to support my wife’s cancer situation. She lived here happily for 10 years doing alternative methods.....The best western medical doctors gave her three years to live. After her death, my son and I moved part time to Los Angeles. Love Los Angeles. Now my son, Leaf, is at NYU in film, and I decided to immerse myself back full time on Kauai. The land, the wind, the trees, the warm blue ocean all of it is hard to emulate anywhere else. I’m inspired here and see my paintings in the trees and vines. I love the Hawaiian people I know. It’s deep here.

You have claimed in the past, and I quote...”I paint every day since 1974...” Is that fact? Yes. I’ve painted everyday, poor or not, through three

marriages, kids, death, divorce, through the ‘death of painting’, ‘bad painting’, isms of all sorts. I asked Phillip Guston in 1980, just before his death, “What do you think of the art world these days”? (kind of a dumb question) He answered, after a pregnant pause, “ I am the art world”.....Don’t you love that! It was an awesome answer. My mentor and painter, Peter Bodnar, told me once, “Just keep painting; paint and you’ll win by default as the others die off”. He’s 89 and still working. Look him up, he is a master. And also, to keep me going, once drunk on red wine with the great painter John Walker....Blue lipped drunk, John grabs my hands and starts massaging them and says over and over again, “paint your fucking heart out, paint your ass off”That kind of transmission doesn’t happen everyday. I am honored and blessed to have great mentors. And I listened to them. So, yeah, I paint everyday.

Where were you born? What were you like on the edge of being seventeen years old? I was born in St. Louis, Missouri. At seventeen I was starting Jr College in Ferguson, Missouri, majoring naively in fine arts. And becoming a long haired hippie after flirting with being a frat man. It turned out to be the best choice.

GW - What do you consider that first seminal, most opportune and important moment of your early career? Having Diane Waldman find me and my work in 1982 while visiting in San Francisco. She was putting together the ‘Emerging American Artists’ bi-annual for the Guggenheim. And that same year, John Berggruen invited me into his prestigious gallery. At the time that was truly valid and solid support from two major people from the art world upper echelons. **Do you roll your eyes when folk dismiss your work as frenetic Abstract Expressionism? - Or do you just say.. ‘just write me a check and I will concur with anything you say’.** TL - The Abstract Expressionists didn’t even like that term. Do Jackson Pollack and deKooning really share a vision? I don’t think so. Painting is painting. It’s classic, like jazz. It’s my job and devotion to continue developing the tradition. Painting keeps going, like jazz didn’t stop..... Its all evolving.

Loved the way you nuanced that response. Nothing GW appreciates more than a brilliant badinage with some very warm and

nonchalant with their intellectual heft. I am loving this conversation. So, anyway -- your latest work , your new one man New York City solo show at the buzzy Georges Berges Gallery is best defined as what? The paintings have evolved for forty years based on the human body, energy, environment along with awareness of what’s been done before. The new work has focused in on a V shape that has been occurring the whole time I’ve been painting. Getting more and more focused and ending up here with that.

Every artist has to always relish growth and taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zone to truly evolve. How do you plan to do that circa 2020? I’ll follow the work. It always guides me. Trust.

GW also read that you have oft been inspired by the work of that ancient master Giacometti If so - why? I’m engaged by artists like Giacometti, Morandi, Guston, that have reveal a unique mark or way , their way of making art. Theystand outside of trends and follow their way.

What’s this Reichian Therapy hocus pocus you also love to wax on about? Sounds like some new Scientology. What is Reichian Therapy? And why do you rave about it so much? Wilhelm Reich was one of Sigman Freud’s students and developed body centered therapy. He’s possibly the first body therapist in the Western world. He saw that people could spend years in talk therapy. He worked with the breath and facilitated releasing blocks in the energetic body. Look him up..... It’s a long story.But it has nothing to do with Scientology.

And Tom -- what is your favorite color? Turquoise

Thanks for this bit of badinage Tom Lieber! Talk now about how you feel about this much anticipated solo show in Soho - New York City. I’m excited to have my work in New York, the critical capital of the world. I haven’t shown here in many years. My center is more West Coast, although I have many collectors in New York. George Berges is young and good and respectful. I like him. I like my work. It will be a good show!

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