

# Eli Bornowsky: $3.3671984954 \times 10^{6391}$

By [Spencer Everett](#)



Eli Bornowsky, *Penrose\_Korman\_Jung (1, 2 - 1, 3, 1 - 1, 4, 1, 1 - 2, 2, 10, 1 - D59x59mod46)*, 2024. Egg tempera, gesso on wood, aluminum, 28 1/2 x 43 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and King's Leap.

The title of Eli Bornowsky's first solo show at King's Leap,  $3.3671984954 \times 10^{6391}$ , suggests the intractability of numbers. Not the number of a given thing, exactly, and not a strength *in* numbers, but the obstinate presence of strength *as* numbers, the numbers as such denoting a greater logic more permanent than anything in physical space. This stubborn yet playful title represents the total number of unique images possible within the particular set of computer-coded variables Bornowsky uses to orchestrate his paintings: variables of color, shape, axis rotation, scaling, and cropping. He works with tessellation—geometric tiling on the Euclidean plane—and is invested in the history of periodic tiling and contemporary mathematical discussions around “tiling the plane.” Bornowsky's work reflects this history of scientific

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discovery, as well as a set of deeply personal methodologies for rendering these concepts as paintings. While a digital system helps him generate positions for colors, and a color model determines the colors for each shape in the study, the actual pigments used and the artist's meticulous execution elevates this computational process into a world unique to the artist's own aesthetic discernment.

Even as these paintings emerge from a place of computation and speed, their execution is lapidary—working with egg tempera is a slow and somatic affair. Egg tempera is noted for its transparent quality, such that Bornowsky's paintings are replete with underpainted layers and fine brushstrokes, adding depth and polychromatic complexity to forms that at the same time remain flat, and—in theory—straightforward. In *Penrose\_6\_color\_3T Y-axis (1, 2 - 1, 3, 1 - 1, 4, 1, 1 - 1, 1, 1, 5, 1 - D59x59mod45) Complete Apex Twin 2* (2024), the forms feel stretched and contorted just as their colors, taking on a textile quality, threaten almost to tear as the blue thins out. In *Penrose\_Korman\_Jung (1, 2 - 1, 3, 1 - 1, 4, 1, 1 - 2, 2, 2, 10, 1 - D59x59mod46) (2024)*, cross-hatched reds and yellows evoke the spokes of a wheel, reinforcing the circularity that dominates the piece overall. Compounding these details, the shapes in each of these paintings are etched, or incised, into the wooden panel, and the marks of these superstructures remain evident even when the color scheme feigns to erase them.

Something about the commitment these methods demand, coupled with the sublimely complicated scientific edifice surrounding them, causes Bornowsky the painter to all but disappear—the work's logic procreates within him and without him. As bold as these paintings can feel, they correspondingly suggest the death of the painter's ego. There's strong historical precedent here—egg tempera has long been associated with religious devotional



Eli Bornowsky, *Penrose\_5 Complete Apex Twin 1*, 2024. Egg tempera, gesso on wood, aluminum, 43 1/4 x 31 3/8 inches. Courtesy the artist and King's Leap.

painting, and remains most used today in Greek and Russian Orthodox iconography. Where a painter and a viewer once sought to lose themselves in reverence toward what was represented, here we have no Christ or saint, no figure to revere. And still these paintings feel like devotion—a devotion to paint itself, but also toward something unseen. Like a daunting book from the Old Testament, or indeed like the title of the exhibition, these paintings and the larger project undergirding them feel like they exist unto themselves, proliferating internally, indifferent to your opinion.



Eli Bornowsky, *Penrose\_Couch\_Notes\_Bach\_Organ* (D59x59mod44 - 5, 10, 15, 2, 3 - 10, 20, 30, 10 - 10, 20, 30, 15, 7 - 1, 1, 1, 5, 1), 2024. Egg tempera, gesso on wood, aluminum, 31 3/8 x 35 3/8 inches. Courtesy the artist and King's Leap.

To walk into a room of Bornowsky's paintings is to confront that indifference as silence and resolution, a kind of peacefulness felt on the work's behalf that's gently unsettled by the consonant-dissonant interplay of a particular painting on a particular set of eyes. While painterly marks abound in all these works, and the shapes are so heavily drawn as to mark the panels, the images rendered feel surprisingly intangible—a product of the eye and the mind that no hand can reach. What's strange is that it's precisely through this patient, sober draughtsmanship that materiality dissolves into a concept made visible.

To look at them scrambles the eyes and evades our picture-making faculties. Are the shapes figures at all? Yes, and no. Does this or that shape lie in front or behind? Neither—or is it both at once? There’s no stable figure-ground relationship, and few shapes seem to remain endemic to the sum of their parts, so no form easily dominates the picture plane because it sinks away from perception just as seamlessly as it arose. In Gestalt psychology, multistability refers to the mind’s ability to perceive multiple forms from a single field of visual information. Unlike, say, four dots that resolve for the mind’s eye into a uniform square, multistable images vacillate between registers. The picture of a rabbit that is also a duck is a famous example. The paintings in this exhibition do something similar, except that without a binary set of referents to fall upon—a rabbit or a duck—we continually fail to land on a stable form. The result is disorientation—we’re adrift in a world that’s always shifting, where little remains what we can make of it for long.

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