



A Son Reflects on Larry Zox and Their East Hampton Roots

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by Alexander Zox

On the occasion of the current [Larry Zox](#) exhibition at [Berry Campbell](#) gallery in New York City, closing May 26, 2017, the artist's son Alexander Zox submitted this personal essay about his father and his family's relationship to East Hampton and the East End of Long Island.

Our house in Springs was off of Dorsett Road, where [Jackson Pollock](#) had his fatal car crash. This had affected me, relative to the fact that my father Larry Zox was also a painter who loved, with abandon, to paint, fish, and have absolutely no apologies for finding avenues for his own creative headlock on life.

Painters existed in a kind of bubble here. But they could also find a sudden end, which I didn't have any notion of how to contemplate. I guess when you are a kid at some point you realize sometimes things could get crazy. When it came down to it, no matter that Larry Zox had a working lobster boat plying the waters of the East End of Long Island named after his wife, the "Jean Marilyn," and one night he almost died fishing in a storm: every waking moment, in his hands tending to something of visceral appeal, in his examination of mixing paint, or his extolling the beauty of the natural patterns on a striped bass, he lived a man obsessed with what he found beautiful, powerful on the edge of life and death. It was all the source of a sort of instant charismatic flow, which he employed when concerned with his own reckoning, relating every aspect of what he loved and what he disliked.



Photo courtesy of Alexander Zox.

[Clement Greenberg](#) used to say "every nuance counts." The second I heard this as a kid it became my mantra. I would repeat it sometimes at Pathfinder Country Day Camp, when somehow the moment struck me as being a logical response to something—without having a full notion of the implications at the time—an apparatus I was fitted with to examine the world. It was about being open, being a searcher, being a hardass, too. A five-year-old considering the virtues of finding a huge painted canvas on the wall, examining it with a hand in front of the right eye, then left, humming to myself and letting things sink in.



“Diagonal IV” by Larry Zox, 1967-1968. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 72 inches.
Courtesy Berry Campbell Gallery, New York.

It didn't matter that other kids might not understand, as long as I understood, this would be my secret. What is Hard Edge Abstraction, what is Color Field, why are we examining the natural world, a horizontal line in the sky, while driving down Three Mile Harbor Hog Creek Road? Why does it take so long to mix paint, to get the right color? Viewing osprey nests, after getting a buttered roll and hot chocolate at the Barnes General Store with my father and sister. Visiting other studios a religious experience, a moment when the guard was let down and the secret plan was revealed. Looking off of our deck at the great woods, unexplained mounds of dirt amongst the juniper trees and pockets of brilliant sunlight winding their way through the underbrush.



Photo courtesy of Alexander Zox.



Photo courtesy of Alexander Zox.

When my father was looking to buy land in Long Island, he made a little model of a house and placed it exactly where he wished in relation to the sunrise and sunset, so that once built it would be flooded with that magical light from the beginning of the day to the beginning of the night.

A basic saltbox shape, the inside had geometric cutaways in the walls, long angular windows to capture that “special light.” Larry painted in a rented old barn, which used to be a smithy's, and which Jackson Pollock also used as a studio. We used to go to Charlie's Fishing Station, where he lost two boats to hurricanes, so we would rent a small boat, get on the water, cast out lines, and catch fish, lots of fish! All the while scanning: lion's head rock, shark fins, exploding schools of bait. The occasional “I am going to get you porgy” song when painter [Dan Christensen](#) would be along for a fishing trip and we were trying to coax some fish to bite, instead of being skunked. Then there would be the hickory chips and the salting and smoking of the bluefish, hours of waiting for the absolute best thing I ever tasted.



Photo courtesy of Alexander Zox.

I remember the beaches shrouded in shells, pink, beige and white. The pull of the undertow, and how paint would dry on the brushes that were left out for too long. Those great gatherings of friends eating from the gardens, both land and sea. My father traversed back and forth from the city, always taking respite here as soon as a piece of business was accomplished. Our house in Manhattan was always in a state of flux, attached to the late great Max's Kansas City by a laser beam sculpture our downstairs neighbor designed. It might as well have been an elevator system, transiting between the two faster than a subway, everyone pouring in day and night.

It's no wonder that when we could get away to the quiet green belly of Springs in East Hampton, we made like rocketry!



"Rotation B" by Larry Zox, 1964. Acrylic on canvas, 58 x 62 inches.
Courtesy Berry Campbell Gallery, New York.

Alexander Zox studied poetry, literature, art history, and comparative religion at Sarah Lawrence College. Creatively involved playing saxophone, writing and drawing, he is working on a memoir of growing up in the 1970s, as a kid in studios.

BASIC FACTS: "Larry Zox (1937-2006)" is on view from April 20 to May 26, 2017 at Berry Campbell, 530 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011. www.berrycampbell.com

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