

Gene Beery
Retrospective
04.05 - 30.06.2019

Gene Beery was born in Wisconsin in 1937. He moved to New York in 1957 and eventually to Sutter Creek, California.

Beery's earliest known works date from 1958, but the artist made his first text paintings in 1960. These unclassifiable works are at the intersection of Fluxus, Minimalism, Conceptualism, neo-Dada and Assemblage Art. Since then, he has questioned the *raison d'être* of artworks and the aesthetic experience with humour and derision. What are the stakes of an encounter between a viewer and an artwork? What does the surface of the canvas promise to whoever looks at it?

A profound reflection on the existence of art and the role of the artist emerge behind the apparent humour and sarcasm of his practice. An inventor of glossolalia and neologisms, he takes a tongue-in-cheek stance and makes puns that mock the vanity of the art world and artistic genius. His constant use of humour means he has been viewed with suspicion and scepticism by the art community. However, it has also allowed him to cut a unique path through the history of art of the last sixty years.

Appearing Soon

The exhibition opens with three historical works made on panels of *Masonite* that the artist recovered on construction sites when returning home from his day's work. These works express the questions that interested Beery and the issues he stood for at the turn of the 1960s, a period of fierce opposition to the dominant Abstract Expressionism and the glamorous surfaces of Pop Art. These «anti-painting paintings» challenge the ideal of creativity, considered as a conservative value. It is in light of these issues that he imagined his first manifesto slogans on art and painting (*This is my Last Serious Painting*, 1960), and became interested in the moment of aesthetic experience (*Watch this Canvas*, 1960-61). The question was to turn into an obsession present in his entire oeuvre.

Vitrine

A Nice Painting Book

The "Beerian" language really took off in 1976, when the artist, his wife Florence and their five children moved into the forests overlooking Sutter Creek, in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. He built his own house and, in the first years there, had neither the time nor the space to paint. Beery was forced to reduce his activity to small format and then started producing simple artists' books. These were to prove an infinite source of inspiration when he began painting again in 1986.



Wall Dancers

The hanging in this room is inspired by the one defined by the artist for his *Wall Dancers* series. Most of the paintings in this room are reduced to their barest components: a limited number of words in black on a generally unprepared canvas. Dating from 1960 up to 2016, they trace out the issues that have inhabited the artist's universe. Reflections on art, the lightness of the everyday, ecology (*Vomit Valley Acres*, 1971), autobiographical references, humour and the absurd. Gene Beery opens a path onto art that is almost exclusively contained in an idea, a word or a phrase, as in the painting *Out of Order* (1960-61). The truncated alphabet (*ABCDEFGHIJLNMHRWXYZQ*, c. 1970), the calendar without figures (*Calendar*, 2004) and the revisited compass (*Counter Clockwise Compass Demonstrating The Truth of Worth*, 1965) testify to Beery's ingenuity in appropriating certain conventions in a joyful non-orthodoxy.

Experiments in Time

This set of five works continues the panorama of his reflections on the essence and the durability of the work of art. *An Experiment in Time* (1972), the irony of which is suggested by the ornamental and festive lettering, as well as *Timeless Tra Nup* (1999) question the principle and the dream of timelessness of artwork. Such excessive ambition is refuted by the virulence of *Mere Decoration* (1976) and *Beauty* (2000), which illustrate the endless debate on the oppositions between «intellectual» and «decorative» essence of art.

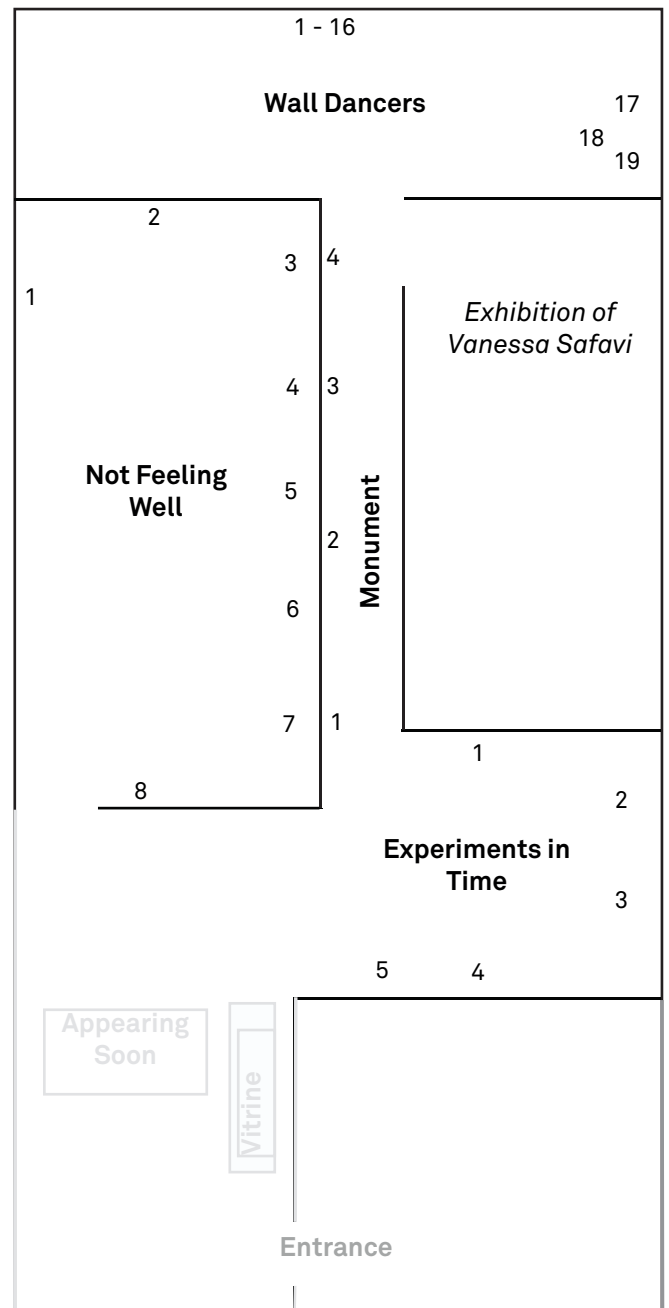
Monument

A series of paintings to be read are displayed in the corridor. Each of these short, absurd, descriptive texts offers a particular approach to considering artistic production or the legitimacy of art (*As Long as There Are Walls There Will Be Paintings!* 1986). The last work on this wall (*Let the Universe Go*, 2011) evokes a certain withdrawal from the world by the artist, who asks that the universe be released from the weight of humanity while suggesting its contemplation as an aesthetic phenomenon «for our amusement».

Not Feeling Well

In 1964, Gene Beery left the art scene in Manhattan to settle near San Francisco. This radical change allowed him to explore new pictorial fields. While his previous works form radically anti-art manifestos, the artist now opened his work to figuration that did not contain any ideological positioning. He was frequently inspired by images from scientific blueprints, the press, textbooks and educational books.

More personal themes such as nature, ecology, family life and meteorological phenomena also permeate his work. Direct autobiographical references are also very present (*I Love You*, 1965; *Clouds*, 1965; *The Power Lines*, 1966) or take on an almost tragicomic aspects (*Lemon Job*, 1969). In this same register, in the work *Mitchell, Greetings!* (2007) we find the text of a letter addressed to his New York gallerist. The natural phenomena represented in *Clouds* (1965), *Moon Trap* (1969), and *The Process by Which* (1970) suggest metaphors for the aesthetic experience.



List of works

Appearing Soon

1. *Howdy Podners ! ...*, 1960, oil on Masonite, 89 x 121.9 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.
2. *Watch this Canvas*, 1960 – 61, oil on Masonite, 91.4 x 122 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

3. *This Is My Last Serious Painting*, 1960, oil on Masonite, 61 x 122 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

4. *Looking for Visual Thrills*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

Vitrine – A Nice Painting Book

1. *Manifesto, Several Visual Arts Manifestos, Many Incognito!*, Gene B. Beery, Sutter Creek, California, USA, 1978, stapled, 21.5 x 27.8 cm, 16 pages (n.p.)

2. *A Nice Painting Book, A Sketchbook Catalog of Actual and Projected Art Works By The Visual Percussionist Eugene B. Beery*, © Copyrights reserved E.B. Beery, 1976, Offset-printed, 1 color stapled, 17.5 x 21 cm, 28 pages, (n.p.)

3. *Title (Front Cover) Author*, c. 1978. Offset-printed, 1 color, stapled, 21.4 x 27.3 cm, 20 pages (n.p.)

4. *Sunrise Sunset, For the Distinguished Limner*, Gene B. Beery, Sutter Creek, California, 1980. Offset-printed, 1 color, stapled, 21.4 x 27.3 cm, 20 pages (n.p.)

5. “*Things’ That ‘ Adults ’ Can ’ Learn ”!* In the Manner of the Namer Tamer, Gene B. Beery, Sutter Creek, California, USA, 1991. Offset-printed, 1 color, stapled, 21.5 x 27.8 cm, 24 pages (n.p.)

6. *Covers, An Astereoscopic Survey of An Outbreak of Artifice Cyclopiphilia*, Gene B. Beery, USA, 1982. Offset-printed, 1 color, stapled, 21.5 x 27.6 cm, 28 pages (n.p.)

7. *Name Self Portrait as the Author of the Titles of Some Imaginary Books*, Eugene Brian John Beery, Sutter Creek, California, USA 1980. Offset-printed, 1 color, stapled, 21.4 x 27.3 cm, 12 pages (n.p.)

8. *Folk Visual Art... A Visual Art Primer For A Folk Without*

A Visual Art, Gene B. Beery, Sutter Creek, California, USA, 1981, stapled, 21.5 x 27.8 cm, 20 pages, (n.p.)

9. *No Shiny Object*, marker on spiral-bound commercial composition book, 2 letters, 22 x 18 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

10. *Title not known (Spectrum Delight)*, 1981, marker on paper (letter and drawing, recto and verso), 28 x 21.6 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

11. *No Shiny Object*, 1985, marker on paper, metal clips, 10 x 15.2 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

12. *Author, Gene B. Beery*, Sutter Creek, California, USA, 1978, stapled, 21.5 x 27.8 cm, 4 pages (n.p.)

Not Feeling Well

1. *Clouds*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 104 x 129.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

2. *Lemon Job*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 81.3 x 81.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

3. *I Love You*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 94 x 92.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

4. *Moon Trap*, 1969, Acrylic on canvas, 74.3 x 75.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

5. *The Power Lines*, 1966, acrylic on canvas, 75.5 x 91.4 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

6. *The Process by Which...*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 76.2 x 71.1 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

7. *Special Event*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 110.5 x 106.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

8. *Mitchell, Greetings!*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

Experiments in Time

1. *Experiment in Time*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 86.4 x 106.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

2. *Beauty*, c. 2000s, acrylic on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

3. *Timeless TRA NUP*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 35.5 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

4. *Mere Decoration*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 63.5 x 49.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

5. *Folk Art Limit*, c. 2000s, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 41 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

Monument

1. *Monument*, 1987, oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

2. *As Long As There Are Walls There Will Be Paintings!*, 1986, oil on canvas, 36 x 45.7 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

3. *This is an Example of an Intended Art Impossible to Visualize Any Other Way*, 1986, oil on canvas, 46 x 35.6 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

4. *Let the Universe Go*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

Wall Dancers

1. *For a Ludicrologist*, 1993, paint on canvas, metal, rubber bands, 38 x 33.2 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

2. *ABCDEFGHIJLNMHRWXYZQ*, c. 1970s, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 61 cm. Private collection, New York.

3. *Calendar*, 2004, pencil and acrylic paint on canvas, 28 x 35.6 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

4. *Life Stars*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 38 x 76 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

5. *Wall Dancers*, from the series *Wall Dancers*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 27.5 x 35 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

6. *Counter Clockwise Compass Demonstrating the Truth of Worth*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 51.1 x 43.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

7. *Check the Word or Words*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 50.80 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

8. *Blue Stew*, from the series *Wall Dancers*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 27.5 x 35 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

9. *Out of Order*, c. 1960, oil on Masonite, 53.3 x 78.7 cm, artist's aluminum frame. Courtesy of Charles LeDray.

10. *Everything is First of all Amazing!*, c. 1990s, acrylic on canvas, 50.8 x 67.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

11. *Free Art Work Tomorrow*, 2015, acrylic on canvas 40 x 51 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

12. *Black Hole Survivor*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 27.5 x 35 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

13. *Vomit Valley Acres*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 53.3 x 63.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

14. *Still Life*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 45.5 x 61 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

15. *Extraordinary Message Tee*, 2002, acrylic on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

16. *Intellectual Painting No. 2*, c.1963 – 1964, tempera on wood, 61 x 61 cm. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut, USA.

17. *Newest Decoration*, 1997, acrylic on canvas, 45.7 x 57 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.

18. *Enough*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 27.5 x 35.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

19. *FLAG*, c. 2000s, acrylic on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Greenspon, New York.