

Fifty Eggs, A History

2005

33 Days = 4 weeks and 5 days

1 week has 4 work sessions

Work sessions average 12 hours and fall on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays

Total number of work sessions from 21 August 2005 until 22 September 2005: 19

1: “I bet I can paint fifty eggs.”

2: “Nobody can paint fifty eggs.”

(silence)

2: “Did you ever paint fifty eggs?”

1: “Nobody ever painted fifty eggs.”

(silence)

3: “Yeah, but in how long?”

(silence)

1: “Thirty-three days.”

In 1998, Dan Bern teamed up with fellow Folk troubadour and guest producer Ani DiFranco for his third CD called “Fifty Eggs.” While I was working on “Hundred Hearts” I started thinking about “Fifty Eggs” simply because $100 \div 2 = 50$. Dan Bern is one of my favorite people. He is a voracious songwriter and committed to his responsibility as a live performer. He is also a highly sensitive observer who gives reports that may disquiet the careful listener. I decided that painting fifty eggs would be an appropriate way to pay tribute to him. For this “volume project” I wanted to hone in on my ability to be a one-person assembly line. I decided to use one design, limit my color for the eggs to one hue family, and apply the paint as fast as physically possible. But then I asked myself *what color is Dan Bern?* I thought of a story about a teenage boy I read in *Israel, A History* by Martin Gilbert. He was part of a group of Palestinian-born Jewish youth who founded the first tower-and-stockade village named Maoz (Stronghold). He volunteered to crush out a path with a tractor before the date of the actual settlement. He worked the tractor at night because he had a job during the day and was urged not to draw attention to the coming settlement of this area. Dan Bern has his work cut out for him in 2005 just like that teenager did back in 1937. Testifying in the name of the truth is as risky as operating a tractor at night in a region favored by looting Bedouin. The courage I see in these young men made me think about the movements a person’s body makes when they wave a flag. I decided to use the colors in the flag of Israel to represent Dan Bern. The flag of Israel is white. It features the Star of David in the center and has two horizontal blue stripes—one near the top and one near the bottom. I chose to paint each egg in the blue or purple-blue (most of my blue paints have purple-blue Munsell Notations) hue families and feature a white band through the central loop of color.

I painted seventeen eggs during the first seven days of the production period. This accelerated rate of picture making made me think of a conversation I had with the painter Neil Berger. Neil told me that when he used to take exams like the Iowa Test he randomly colored in the numbered dots because he didn’t care. But it wasn’t so much what he said. It was the gestures that went along with it. He thrashed his arms in the air with an imaginary number two pencil in his right hand and shouted, “I don’t care! I don’t care! I don’t care!” From that moment on, I wondered if the day would come that I didn’t care. Let me explain. Neil builds such things as landscapes and still lives out of thick and viscous oil paint. I believe that Neil doesn’t care how his paintings are going to come out while he is

painting them. This is my perception and the kind of fearlessness I deem necessary to bust through all the barricades that can possibly stand between the artist and their practice. After recapping this encounter with Neil, and the realization that followed, I understood that as a result of painting so much and so fast—the day had finally come that I too didn't care.

On 2 September 2005 I told this story about Neil and my newfound freedom to my friend Fred Gillen Jr. He thought for a moment and said; "Now you are being reckless."

RECKLESS.

Then Fred asked, "Do you know where Dan got the title for "Fifty Eggs?"

"No," I replied.

"He got it from the egg-eating contest scene in "Cool Hand Luke."

I saw "Cool Hand Luke" in 1984 during one of Professor John Cuniberti's "History of Modern Film" classes at Westchester Community College. I remember Professor Cuniberti discussing the Christ-imagery in the film's egg-eating contest scene. *The number fifty is significant because there are fifty prisoners' souls and fifty eggs. Luke's ingesting of the eggs corresponds to Christ taking the sins of the world upon Himself and bringing about a rebirth. Eggs, the celebration of Easter, and the resurrection are symbolically linked together.* The Christ-image that had the greatest impact on me was in the segment after Luke's victory. Luke is seen from overhead lying on a table scattered with eggshells. He is by himself with his arms outstretched and his legs are crossed at the ankle in a Christ-like crucifixion pose. Upon remembering this moment in "Cool Hand Luke," I recalled the last verse of "Monica" from "Fifty Eggs." This song is about Monica Seles. In 1993 Seles was stabbed between the shoulder blades by a deranged fan of Steffi Graf during a changeover at a tennis tournament in Hamburg, Germany. She did not play competitively for more than two years after the incident.

And oh, Monica

There you are, Monica

On the cross with Jesus

And Martin Luther King

Just like John Lennon by that hotel

You have to pay for our sins

Just like Jesus by that hotel

You have to pay for our sins

I can't help but wonder if the title "Fifty Eggs" came to Dan Bern's mind because he feels that Monica Seles *took the sins of the world upon herself* like Luke. But then again sometimes things connect themselves by accident and elapsed time reveals the tie.

After I summed up the data pertaining to "Fifty Eggs," I documented that the project was executed over a thirty-three day period. Jesus Christ was thirty-three years old when he was crucified. *Sometimes things connect themselves by accident and elapsed time reveals the tie.*

