

DEREK ELLER GALLERY



The Helicopter Never Lands, 2025-26, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 60.5 inches

STEVE DIBENEDETTO

Spiral Architect

March 27 – April 25, 2026

Opening Reception: Friday, March 27, 6–8 pm

Here's my submission of a plot synopsis for a motion picture treatment based on the life and work of painter Steve DiBenedetto.

This is not a conventional biopic. It's a darkly comic, visually chaotic, and metaphysical character study that mirrors the complexity of DiBenedetto's paintings. Think *Pi* meets *Adaptation* with the psychotronic energy of *Enter the Void* and the neurotic wit of *Barton Fink*.

Title: *The Spiral Architect*

Genre: Psychological art biopic / dark comedy / speculative reality

Tone: Claustrophobic, anarchic, philosophically trippy: a descent into the painter's mind where helicopters, octopuses, and cosmic architecture fight for dominance.

Logline: A reclusive New York painter descends into an obsessive, hallucinatory creative spiral as he attempts to finish a massive canvas combining utopian architecture, war machines, and psychic chaos all while battling his own collapsing reality and the ghost of Buckminster Fuller.

Plot Synopsis:

ACT I - THE CAGE OF STRUCTURE

STEVE DIBENEDETTO, mid-30s, lives in a rent-controlled apartment in pre-Giuliani New York. It's cluttered like a mad scientist's bunker: tentacles of dried paint hang off easels, sketchbooks are full of geometries and helicopter rotors drawn like mandalas. Steve is brilliant, reclusive, chronically anxious and convinced that a certain perfect painting could unify mind, machine, memory, and matter.

He's working on a triptych the size of a garage door, built up over 12 years. Each time he gets close to finishing it, something intervenes: either a new thought, a pattern he didn't see, or an apocalyptic vision involving cephalopods crawling through the Lincoln Tunnel. As he works, objects in his studio begin subtly shifting, forming structures from his own drawings. A model helicopter levitates. Paintbrushes spin. A ceiling crack becomes a geodesic dome.

ACT II - THE OCTOPUS PARADOX

Steve's internal logic begins to unwind. He's haunted by the voice of Buckminster Fuller, who appears as a flickering hologram offering cryptic advice like "Collapse is only form in reverse." He's pursued by an art dealer trying to brand him as "The Prophet of Collapse" and an over-

eager curator who wants to put his unfinished mega-painting into a group show called "Techgnosis: Art After the Internet." Steve becomes increasingly paranoid, thinking the curator is actually a quantum octopus in human disguise, sent to trap him in a Mobius loop of art-world hype. Flashbacks show Steve as a younger man in the '80s Lower East Side: chain-smoking, absorbing the punk scene, reading William Burroughs, and painting spirals on the walls of abandoned buildings. These moments flicker like half-buried memories, looping and glitching like a corrupted VHS.

ACT III - *THE HELICOPTER NEVER LANDS*

Steve holes up in his apartment for weeks. He paints obsessively, mixing pigment with his own blood and expired acrylic gel. He stops speaking aloud. He paints a perfect octopus. It morphs into a city. It becomes a helicopter. Then a brain. Then nothing.

Eventually, the painting collapses in on itself literally. The stretcher bars break. The canvas tears. Steve stands amid the wreckage and laughs genuinely, cathartically, maybe for the first time in the entire film.

In the final scene, Steve walks into a gallery where his paintings are now shown behind glass. Children stare in silence. One of them asks, "What is it?" Steve, now quiet and older, replies: "It's everything. It's too much. That's why it works."

Themes:

- The fine line between visionary genius and madness
- The impossibility of finishing a truly complete work
- The war between abstraction and structure, intuition and control
- The burden of being understood
- The beauty of chaos

Visual Style:

- Animated layers emerge from the canvas as Steve paints rotors become fractals, octopuses dissolve into DNA chains.
- Flashbacks shot on degraded 16mm with abrupt cuts and surreal inserts.
- Studio becomes a mind-space walls expand, domes unfold, gravity bends.
- Helicopter rotors become a repeated visual motif sometimes literal, sometimes drawn in the air by his hand.

Steve DiBenedetto (b. 1958, lives and works in New York, NY) has exhibited extensively including solo shows at Académie Conti | Le Consortium, Vosne-Romanée, France; galerie frank elbaz, Paris, France; Galerie Sardine, Amagansett, NY; the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; and David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY. He has been included in museum exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Neues Museum, Nurnberg, Germany; Kunstverein Museum Schloss Morsbroich, Leverkusen, Germany; MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland; and others. His work is included in public collections such as The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. This will be his fifth solo exhibition with the Gallery.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 38 Walker Street between Broadway and Church Street. Hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.