

# LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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## Melissa Meyer

Yau, John. "Weekend Studio Visit: Melissa Meyer in Midtown Manhattan, New York" *Hyperallergic*, December 15, 2013.

<http://hyperallergic.com/98147/weekend-studio-visit-melissa-meyer-in-midtown-manhattan-new-york/>

## HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

### Weekend Studio Visit: Melissa Meyer in Midtown Manhattan, New York

by John Yau on December 15, 2013



Melissa Meyer, "Desto" (2013)

At some point, while sitting in Melissa Meyer's studio, and talking about artists and shows that we admired, such as the calligraphic paintings of Bradley Walker Tomlin, we discovered that we had both been moved by *Jean Dubuffet, The Last Years*, the opening exhibition of the newly renovated Jeu de Palme, Paris, in 1991. In his last paintings — which were also recently featured in the Pace exhibition, *Jean Dubuffet: The Last Two Years* (January 20–March 10, 2012) — Dubuffet stopped depicting figures segmented into black-outline shapes, and started painting free-floating colors and forms with a new freedom.

This was why I had come to Meyer's studio. Over the past decade, Meyer, rightfully characterized by David Cohen "as virtually without a peer as a lyrical abstractionist," moved from the lyrical to the disjunctive. She literally gave up what she knew how to do so well, which was to loop thick, juicy brushstrokes of oil paint slowly and elegantly — like a brightly

dressed ice skater — across a canvas surface. I first wrote about this change in her work in *The Brooklyn Rail* (March 2009) and wanted to follow up. I was not disappointed.

In order to effect this change, which transpired between 2001 and 2003, Meyer made a number of decisions, all of which impacted her practice. She began making watercolors, which led her to thin her oil paint to a more liquid consistency. This was followed by a commission for two huge murals (one is forty feet high and the other is sixty feet long) for the Shiodome City Center in Tokyo, which led Meyer to begin using Photoshop as a compositional aid.

Literally speaking, the commission got her to think about breaking up the



Front door of Melissa Meyer's studio

field across which her lush brushstrokes once unfurled unimpeded. While working on the commission she became interested in discontinuity, perhaps because she knew that a brushstroke that moved unbroken across a sixty foot surface would be the wrong kind of supreme fiction as well as a denial of her own physical engagement with the medium.

In her recent work Meyer initially creates a patchwork ground of different-sized rectangles: white, pale yellow, pink, green and cantaloupe-colored. Using these grounds as bordered areas — the opposite of Dubuffet — Meyer draws linear glyphs, usually in darker colors than the grounds. The line may exceed the ground's borders, but never by very much.

Using oil paint diluted to the consistency of watercolor (or dirty turpentine) requires that Meyer lay the painting flat on the ground. Otherwise, the paint would drip and run, which the artist clearly doesn't want. In 2009, when I [reviewed her show](#) at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., where she will open an exhibition of these new paintings [next month](#) (January 9–February 15, 2014), the yellows in the ground were brighter, sharper and sunnier. In the new work, the grounds are paler and — more importantly — she has moved from mere cacophony to courting the anarchic.

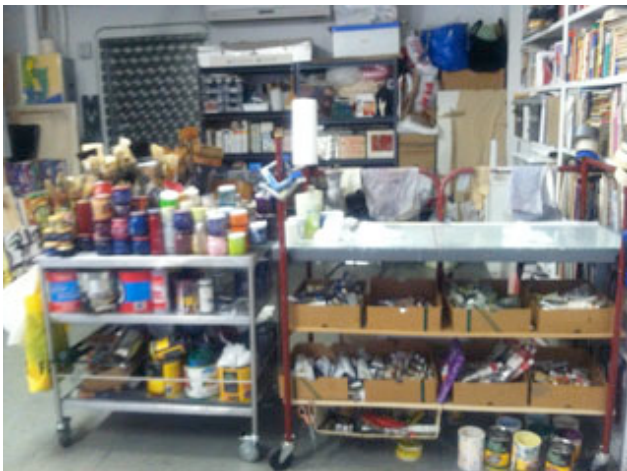


*Melissa Meyer, "Inky" (2013)*

In "Inky" (2013), the ground's rectangles are abutted together; its irregular, patchwork grid consists of pale yellows and cantaloupe, yellow-greens, and pale greens. Over this she has drawn with brushes of varying widths. The lines range from translucent gray to deep violet, from dry to wet, and from thin to relatively thick. Some lines bleed. There are sharp angles and rounded curves — triangles, circles and rectangles. You have to pick them out. While "Inky" is all of a piece, it doesn't add up to an over-all pattern or pictorial image. Each part calls for attention, presses one to look more closely.

In "Inky" and other recent works in the studio, looking becomes an act of registering distinctions, ruptures, and changes of different kinds, each of which imbues a line with a particular identity. No two are alike, however similar they might initially appear.

The strength of Meyer's recent paintings is that no matter what associations they stir up — and there are many — they don't become diluted in the looking, don't become abstractions of something else, a landscape or a building's facade, for example. I think this is the hardest and most elusive place for art of any kind to occupy



*Interior of Melissa Meyer's studio*

— the place that resists characterization and naming, the literal. It is — in the current situation — that not well-regarded place Walter Pater pointed to when he wrote, "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music." I don't believe Pater meant that art should be elitist or pure; rather, he was opposed to both the symbolic and literal — anything content to occupy the realm of discursive explication — which in this day and age ranges from the kitschy to the theoretical.

At the same time, I was reminded that Meyer lived for many years in Tribeca, and that her place was on the sixth floor, facing the World Trade Center. She could see the twin towers from her front hall and, as she later told me, saw the second plane go over her building. I don't think 9/11 was foremost in her mind when she painted "Inky" and other works, but I also don't think it was something she suppressed or forgot.

One could make a connection between the destruction of the towers and her recent paintings, but that would be reductive and rather simplistic. Still, the association, however faint, is there. And it is that faintness, that smoldering awareness that lurks in our thoughts — like a spark waiting to bloom — which I find so powerful.



*Melissa Meyer, "Do Si Do" (2013)*

None of us are ever that far away from the nothingness that awaits us all.

In her earlier work, the viewer could visually and viscerally grasp Meyer's desire for the sensual and the lucid, for optimism and light. During the last decade, she has crossed a threshold. The calligraphic glyphs are a visual stammer poised on the edge of, but never sliding into, the inchoate.

Meyer's paintings are meditations on mortality. Rather than offering solace or transcendence, they inform us that change and disintegration are all that stand between us and what we call "infinity." This is the beauty and pain that Meyer has gotten in her work. It is further proof why abstract art remains powerful.



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## Melissa Meyer

Corio, Paul. "Seen In New York, January 20, 2014" *Abstract Critical*, February 3, 2014.  
<http://abstractcritical.com/article/seen-in-new-york-january-2014/>

### abstract *critical*

3 February 2014

## Seen In New York, January 2014

*Written by Paul Corio*



Devlin, 2013, 70 x 80", oil on canvas

Melissa Meyer's painting occupies a space in between gestural abstraction and calligraphy; it's neither and both. More importantly, she can make a mark that seems like a natural occurrence – there isn't a single contrived curlycue among all the ribbon-like strokes in her current solo show at Lennon Weinberg, and if it looks that easy it invariably means it took years to hone. The paintings have all of the most appealing qualities of watercolor, especially transparency, but with a scale and color saturation that isn't available in that medium. The stand-out for me was the large-scale *Devlin*, nearly 7' across – it looked like a huge watercolor that had its color intensified in Photoshop, with oranges and reds that glowed like stained glass.

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## Melissa Meyer

Rhodes, David. "Risk on the Horizon: Melissa Meyer at Lennon, Weinberg" *Artcritical*, February 9, 2014.

<http://www.artcritical.com/2014/02/09/david-rhodes-on-melissa-meyer/>

**artcritical**  
the online magazine of art and ideas

### Risk on the Horizon: Melissa Meyer at Lennon, Weinberg

by David Rhodes

*Melissa Meyer: Recent Work at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.*

January 9 to February 15, 2014

514 West 25th Street, between 10th and 11th avenues

New York City, 212-941-0012



*Smokey*, 2013, 60 x 84", oil on canvas

As a vehicle for combining color and light there is no better material means in painting than watercolor. Its properties are well documented, though that doesn't diminish, in the right hands, its capacity to surprise. Willem de Kooning was well-acquainted with its particular qualities, valuing both its subtlety and its capacity for directness; the medium fit well with his desire for a spontaneity capable of conflating lived life and studio practice. It seems this is something equally appealing to Melissa Meyer who has achieved it, arguably, without the associated drama of abstract expressionist ways. While choosing to pass on that generation's angst, Meyer continues a tradition of abstraction without

foregrounding personal struggle—which isn't to say she in any way takes it easy. As Mary Heilmann said of her own work, there is no need to "Duke it out" with paintings as Ab-Ex artists once appeared to do. The difficulties and challenges of painting are not eschewed, as they are not necessarily a correlative of a combative or risk-filled life. As Larry Poons said, risks are better taken in painting than when crossing the road.

This exhibition, Meyer's third at Lennon, Weinberg, makes the best possible use of a relatively narrow space that affords views of considerable distance from front to back. Groups of works encompass a range of temperature from black and white works on paper made in 2012, through paintings like *Little Smokey*, 2013, that evince a relatively austere range of color, to the painting *Shuffle*, 2013 which is warm and expansive. *Little Smokey*, 2013, is a horizontal diptych whose

lateral emphasis recalls the proportions of Cinemascope, an apposite association in view of the artist's long-standing interest in cinema. The bluish-black and violet brushed tracks have a calligraphic quality, but they are not writing per se or distinct pictograms, and describe a dry melt of turns and curves that speed up and slow down in bursts. Their episodic yet linked characteristics enfold an idea of the uneven flow of time rather as cinema can vary pace through editing. These separate yet always active passages imply and dismantle an idea of the grid using askew rectangular sections that establish an irregular and constantly changing pulse. The saturated or pale yellow, pink and off white areas join the energized armature in leaving only brief pauses for the eye to halt until continuing helter-skelter (think also of the Beatles song of the same name). Chinese landscape painting and the sculptures of David Smith both come to mind, though here any comparisons are made with the understanding that a thorough reinvention has taken place. The changes of illumination and contrast made possible by the under-painting pull what might otherwise be a very frontal composition into a torqued, flickering, pulsing set of loosely-defined spaces that recalls the coexistence of disparate spaces and scale changes in Chinese 18th-century painting.



*Devlin*, 2013, 70 x 80", oil on canvas

There are three paintings that share the same chromatic range as *Little Smokey* and are placed in the same area of the gallery that nonetheless diverge in subtle, exploratory ways. In the larger *Smokey*, (2013) the change in scale of the mosaic of compartments and the reduced contrast as well as the blurring through washed color implies changes of focus amidst a sweeping, undulating pattern of light. Meyer achieves contrast from one painting to the other though shifts in color and structure, ever mindful of the potential of discordant and disjunctive means. These means, nevertheless, unexpectedly cohere whilst not submitting to stasis. In *Devlin*, (2013) for example, a painting of contrasting lushly warm and sharply cool colors, there is no predictable sequence yet overlapping and

always extending riffs somehow don't fall apart thanks to an implied melody.

With Meyer, drawing and painting play an equal role in generating her linear element – and she cannot be accused of forsaking either in not separating them. An arabesque can remain just that or it can thicken and double to become a shape. Other times areas of color are drawn over or partially cancelled out, the choice constantly varying. When it comes to her consideration of composition, spontaneity would appear to win out over structure because the hand is ahead of thought. But there is no attendant loss of control as experience clearly informs the hand as much as it does thought. A painting always happens over a period of time: it is a time-based medium after all, a fact of which Meyer's approach makes a virtue by repeatedly elapsing one painterly moment or relationship into the next, simultaneously exposing the process and allowing it to run backwards and forwards for the viewer. There is always discovery in Meyer's paintings, even when there are clear horizons to head towards.