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Melissa Meyer

Guy Nichols, Matthew. "Melissa Meyer." *Art in America*, December 2005.

Melissa Meyer at Elizabeth Harris

By opening its season with a show of abstract paintings by Melissa Meyer, the Elizabeth Harris Gallery offered a visual analogue to the unseasonably warm weather that recently stretched well into October. All nine of these medium to large oils on canvas appear thoroughly sun-drenched, and repeatedly capture the rich, colorful, almost palpable quality of light in late summer.

Meyer's new paintings are partially derived from a series of watercolors that she created during a recent residency in Genoa, Italy. Their influence is betrayed by the artist's use of heavily diluted oil paints, which she applies to her canvases with the finesse of a calligrapher. As in the past, Meyer lays down her thinned pigments in discrete loops and scribbles, ultimately building grid-based compositions from these episodic brushstrokes in a rainbow of colors. In *Garden at Villa Orbiana I* (all works 2005), for example, tangled ribbons of teal, violet and fuchsia are nonetheless marshaled into rows and columns. The combination of gesture and order evokes a

flowering vine, its organic rhythms governed by an invisible trellis.

While such delicate scrims are literally foregrounded in all of these paintings, Meyer's new works gain their striking radiance from her inventive manner of underpainting. Every canvas has first been covered in a rough checkerboard of warm whites, butter yellows and flesh pinks. Since these patchwork grounds are largely obscured by her lattices of aerated brushwork, the subtle tonal distinctions among the underlying squares are not immediately apparent. One's first impression is more sensory than rational, as a fugitive light seems to shift in intensity across each canvas. This effect is strongest in "*O the Times, O the Manners*," a 14-foot-wide diptych where the eye has abundant room to roam and a veritable wall of light bleeds through an all-over scaffolding of blue, green and pink calligraphy. In certain places the pale ground is glimpsed as golden; in others it emanates a vaguely rosy hue. Rather than convey a uniform, transparent illumination, Meyer renders light as a changeable, chromatic presence, pulsing and fading before one's eyes.

One painting in this show may signal an interesting departure for Meyer. *Fancy Free* is another diptych whose 10-foot-wide expanse has first been covered with patches of lemon and mustard yellow. But here Meyer's linear filigree is mostly replaced by a second layer of blocked out color. Though solid, these green and scarlet rectangles are far from opaque. Painted with diluted oils, they allow the yellow ground to seep through from behind, like light penetrating swatches of sheer fabric.

—Matthew Guy Nichols



Melissa Meyer: "*O the Times, O the Manners*," 2005, oil on canvas, 65 by 168 inches; at Elizabeth Harris.