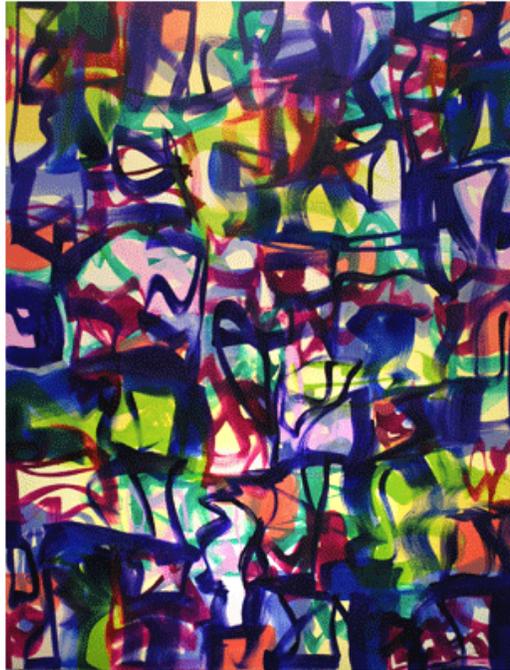


Interview with Melissa Meyer by Lauren Britton

October 2013



Elysium for SM, 2012, oil on canvas, 65 x 50 inches

Melissa Meyer First, I'll just tell you these three paintings are not finished. I kept them out, but I don't like to show unfinished paintings. I had a bad experience once when I was at Yaddo in 1974. The painter Ray Parker, who's died since then, looked at a painting and he loved it, and it was really hard to work on it after that. So, I don't do that anymore.

Lauren Britton Fair enough.

Melissa I'm stronger now, I could change my mind. This one is finished. I worked on this one after I came back from Steamboat Springs.

Lauren You said that these paintings aren't done, how do you know when a painting is done?

Melissa That's a really hard question to answer because it's a visual thing. I am making paintings to decide what my criteria is.

Lauren You look at it and you know?

Melissa Yes, it's a little scary if I like it at this stage.

Lauren Why?

Melissa Because, I will have to lose most of the painting to get something better. In a slide talk I did, I showed a painting that I thought was finished... afterwards I went to Italy for several weeks and came back and I don't want to say I re-painted it, but I finished it. It can be hard to know when something is done. Everybody works differently; some people actually know what the painting is going to look like before they do it.

Lauren Can you talk a little bit about your process?

Melissa I only work on one size at a time. I'll work on small paintings or work on large paintings or medium but it has to be one size and a lot of times I do mates. I do this so that I don't put all of my visual ideas into one painting - these paintings both started with the same feel. My work is very improvisational—I hope like some of the best Jazz musicians. To make the work, I put newspaper out on the floor and I paint on the floor. My process came out of a love/hate relationship with watercolor. I used to think watercolor didn't have the muscle of oil paint and it was for hobbyists and women artists.

Lauren You didn't want to be like that?

Melissa I didn't.

Lauren What changed your mind about it?

Melissa I had to teach watercolor. I started out subbing for somebody and then I taught myself. I had spent four months in Switzerland working on a show at a farmhouse. It was very nice. At that time of year in Switzerland, it's light until almost 11 o'clock at night. So there I was, and it

was funny, because there was only so much reading you could do and so much painting... then I started doing watercolors. Watercolor is very transparent and translucent. I stopped using white paint, so that completely changed my painting. I thinned out my colors and I only use white paint for the field, what I call the field. The paintings I am doing now are influenced by watercolor. I did a large series of monotypes with watercolor... I find it to be a beautiful process.

Lauren How do you think of the mark making in these works? It seems like you are working with and against gesture.

Melissa The mark, in these works, has to do with my youth and love of dance. I did a lot of collage and I am sifting through images in my mind all the time, and they come out in "my dance". I love architecture and my work goes back and forth in between being 'urban' and I guess you could say 'rural'. Right now I think I'm in a real urban thing because I haven't been in to the country in awhile.

Lauren The relationships you set up between the gestures and color, seem to be in conversation with one another. Is there a way that you decide how the color is placed throughout the canvass?

Melissa It is about rhythms. It has to feel right. There's bounce and rhythms... I'm dealing with all the things that somebody who is making more geometric work is dealing with, but I'm dealing with the gestural. So it's the movements of the brushstrokes. I'm very careful with the size of the brushes and the marks they make, and how I load up the brush, and how fast I can move it.

Lauren Do you find that the marks are often really fast when you're making them or do you have a variation of speed?

Melissa I surprise myself sometimes.

Lauren Do you have a pre-decided palette when you're beginning a painting? You said you only use white in the field, so the marks are more of a pure hue on top of that.

Melissa Right, I'll start with one color and, it might have something to do with the one I just did before. Like this painting, I don't like. It's too regular. I like the marks but I just don't like the

painting. That's a good thing because I will try a bunch of things with it now. I'll attack it until I like what it is doing.

Lauren What artists are you looking at?

Melissa I once read that Matisse said not to be too involved with your contemporaries. I see everything that's going on, I'm interested and I try to be supportive in any way that I can. But basically it's artists like Debuffet. And Joan Mitchell and Bradley Walker Tomlin – another very underrated artist. If you don't know him you should look him up, really great painter, died young, and he was gay - I think that didn't help in that group - he's very close to Phillip Guston. He's probably about 10 years older than Guston, but great painter. I think he was like 53 when he died, something crazy like that.