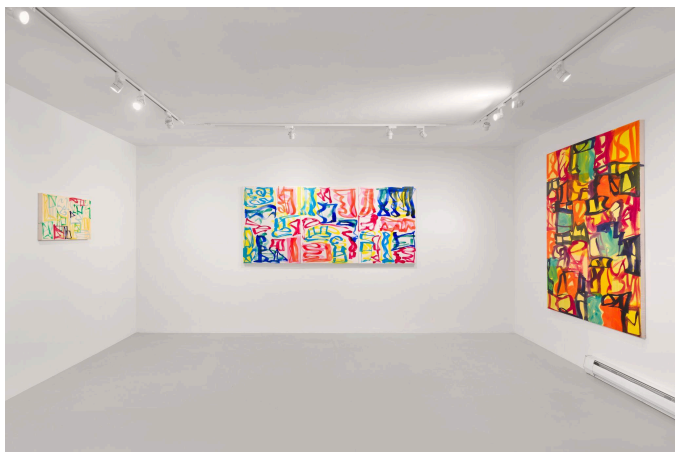


# IN CONVERSATION

## MELISSA MEYER AND MADELEINE BIALKE

*Melissa Meyer is joined in conversation with London based artist, Madeleine Bialke, to discuss her debut solo exhibition at Olympia in New York. Throughlines is on view from May 18 to June 29, 2024.*



Melissa Meyer: Throughlines, Olympia, Installation View. Images: [left] Double Take I, 2017; Springtime Trio, 2024; Lizzie Hazeldean, 2010

**MADELEINE BIALKE:** I want to talk to you about your show ‘Throughlines’ at Olympia, presenting a survey of your work from the last two decades. What was the curation process like? How were those paintings selected?

**MELISSA MEYER:** Well, Ali and Chantal have been through my studio multiple times over the last two years. It’s really quite a small selection when you think about it. They also placed one of my books in a vitrine.

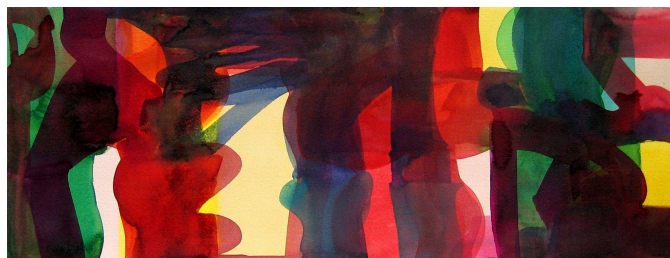
**MB:** I remember that sometime in the late 1990’s you started to do these more washy, loose glyph paintings. They came from watercolors, which you had started to do. And then your oil paintings became more like watercolors?

**MM:** Yes, I stopped using white paint. Even though I do use Naples yellow—that has white paint in it, you know. And it really changed my work. And how did I start watercolors? I’d never done it because I thought it was for women artists and hobbyists. And it didn’t have the muscle of oil paint, the whole thing. And that’s one of the reasons why I don’t use acrylic paint. Because you make a gesture and then it goes flat. Well now I’m sure there’s stuff that people do—the paint’s gotten so much better.

**MB:** Yeah, I’m sure people have a great time with it. But they can have it, you don’t have to.

**MM:** There’s different mediums and thickeners that when I was young didn’t exist. But, I subbed for a friend who was teaching watercolor at SVA. And I watched the students doing the work and thought, oh, this is nice, they’re doing beautiful work. So then I was living in Switzerland for four months in the summer so it was light until like eleven o’clock at night, so I could work in my studio without artificial light a lot longer. In those evenings I taught myself watercolor.

**MB:** And then there’s the watercolors you did at Bogliasco, which seemed like a precursor to the sort of new language you developed on view in ‘Throughlines.’



Melissa Meyer, Bogliasco Watercolor, 2005, Watercolor on cold press paper, 6 x 15 ¾ in (15.2 x 40 cm)

**MM:** Oh, right. And you have one of them, don't you?

**MB:** Yeah, I'll brag about that in the interview. Just kidding. But those Bogliasco watercolors feel very landscape or nature derived. What were you thinking about with those?

**MM:** Because it was so inspiring to be where I was— it was so beautiful. The sunsets, the landscape; completely different from my urban life.

**MB:** I was also thinking about how this two-decades of your work is very collage-like. In that, collages require a lot of planning and layering, yet how you seem to have a sense of making them — the paintings— seem so effortless and rhythmic. How much do you plan the transparent color layers from start to finish?

**MM:** Honestly, there isn't a lot of planning.

**MB:** Leaps of good faith and chance?

**MM:** Well, you know, my favorite quote from Louis Pasteur— "Accidents favor the prepared mind."

**MB:** So you have a kind of formula, but you deviate from it ever so slightly and create your own surprises?

**MM:** Well, I'll put something down. It's sort of like 'question and answer'. I'll put something down and then I'll say, oh, wait a minute, move this around, and I have the option to move everything around anyway. I don't lock it in right away and I can keep moving things around. Now in the past I used a reducing glass, which I bought in the 80's from the Provincetown art supply store because the painter Jim Foresberg told me Joan Mitchell used one too, in order to get further from her paintings in her studio, to see them from a some distance. Now I have my iPhone and I can photograph the paintings, I can do all kinds of different things with that. I work on the floor, working above it, so I can go upside-down and move things around. Like in Springtime Trio, I kept changing it, turning it around until I finally said, Okay Melissa, you have to decide. Anyways, that's sort of how it works.

**MB:** And because you're working with transparent paint— akin to watercolor— you can't go back. You can't do something over again. You have to always go forward.

**MM:** Exactly, and you have to learn to live with it. I'll also tell myself, okay, if it's no good I'll do another one. I don't usually do that, but I know I have the option.

**MB:** And it gives you the freedom to be bold.

**MM:** Bold, exactly. And it's scary but that's okay. I'm willing to fail because I know I can always get another canvas. I can get some more paper. And I don't have to show anybody my failures. And sometimes I find, later on, that I ruined something that was really okay and a good start. And that's a little heartbreaking, really. But it's all a part of the process. You understand that, right?

**MB:** Yes, but I repaint everything, so there's always the option of a do-over. I'm more shy, you see.

**MM:** I don't know about that, but anyway.



Melissa Meyer, untitled, 1990, Oil stick on paper, in four parts, 60 x 44 ½ in (152.4 x 113 cm)

**MB:** I had the pleasure of curating you into a show at Olympia in 2021, and we hung some of your black and white oil stick drawings, which I love bringing up.

**MM:** Right? Because.

**MB:** Because they're so good.

**MM:** Thank you.

**MB:** I love finding things that were happening in your early work that led you to the paintings in this show, the origin stories. I feel like those black and white oil sticks developed this inky dynamic shape that has carried through for many years, a spiky calligraphic mark. Also very bold.

**MM:** But they were limiting, they don't have a lot of value range. And oil sticks don't have the same fluidity.

**MB:** They're more carved out somehow. There's a sort of reductive quality, you're using the white over black sometimes.

**MM:** It has to do with the difference between using a brush which has a kind of softness to it, and the oil stick which is harsh and waxy.

**MB:** —and has to be pressed down.

**MM:** Yes, with a brush there are more accidents possible. Beautiful accidents though.

**MB:** You've also talked about gesture as muscle memory, not expression.

**MM:** Did I say that?

**MB:** Actually, I'm not sure. But you endorsed it! How your gestures are less about mood and feeling, and more measured. Shapes that respond to other shapes that respond to others. It's like the paintings are talking to us in your own language. Another thing you said before that I really loved is about the time element in your painting, how it's a thing that

is less fixed to always go forward like in music and dance. That one successful thing about a painting is that you can take it in all at once or in parts.

**MM:** Right! And you can't really do that with reading books, they push forward. Maybe poetry...

**MB:** But in painting you can zero in on one corner, the other, the middle, the whole, there's a huge sense of freedom of time in receiving paintings. And these glyphs, borne out of your watercolor paintings, can almost be read in a way, and there's no rule as to how you read them. There's a pace to them in this grid-like structure. Active, but steady.



Melissa Meyer, *She Belongs to Me*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 60 x 50 x 1.5 in (152.4 x 127 x 3.8 cm)

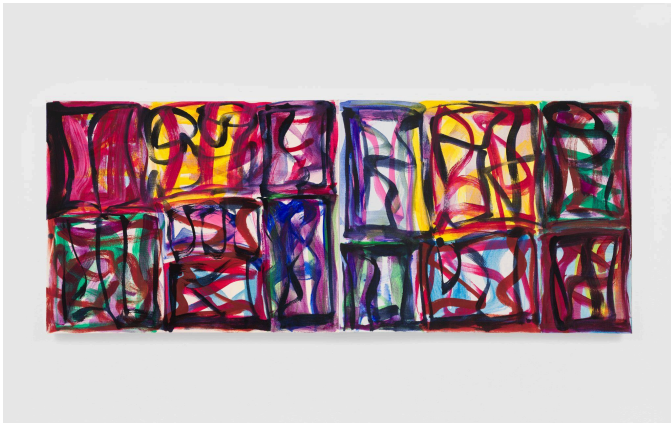
**MM:** I think of setting up rhythms— visual rhythms— either up or down, left and right. Like dance, which is another love of mine.

**MB:** Like a visual score, or something.

**MM:** Yes, all contained in and moving through the space of the rectangle.

**MB:** Well, Melissa it's been so nice to talk about this show, and about twenty years of thinking through paint.

**MM:** Let's not end this conversation, and continue in the future. Next time more about you and your work than me!



Melissa Meyer, Sei Parti I, 2022, Oil on canvas, 24 x 60 x 1.5 in (61 x 152.4 x 3.8 cm)

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[“Melissa Meyer: Throughlines,”](#) Olympia, 41 Orchard Street, New York, NY. Through June 29, 2024.

**Melissa Meyer** received both a BS and MA from New York University. Her lengthy exhibition history includes solo exhibitions at: Anders Wahlstedt Fine Art (New York, NY); Contemporary Art Matters (Columbus, OH); 39 Great Jones (New York, NY); Lennon Weinberg Inc. (New York, NY); Elizabeth Harris Gallery (New York, NY); Rebecca Ibel Gallery (Columbus, OH); Holly Solomon Gallery (New York, NY); and Galerie Renee Ziegler (Zurich, Switzerland). Meyer's development has been surveyed in two traveling exhibitions - one originated at the New York Studio School (New York, NY) and the second at Swarthmore College (Swarthmore, PA).

Her works have been included recently in group exhibitions at: The Jewish Museum (New York, NY); Texas Gallery (Houston, TX); Montclair Art Museum (Montclair, NJ); The Hyde Collection (Glens Falls, NY); and the National Academy of Design (New York, NY), an organization of which she is a member. She has completed public commissions in New York, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Bishkek US Embassy in Kyrgyzstan.

Meyer's work is included in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Jewish Museum, and many other public and private collections across the United States. Meyer was awarded a Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome and has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pollock Krasner Foundation and a fellowship from the Bogliasco Foundation. She is a frequent artist in residence at Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York as well as at the Vermont Studio Center.

**Madeleine Bialke** (b. 1991 in New York) received her BFA in Studio Art from Plattsburgh State University of New York and earned an MFA in Painting at Boston University, Massachusetts. Solo exhibitions include 'Giants in the Dusk, Huxley-Parlour, London, UK; 'Death Motel,' Newchild Gallery, Antwerp, BE; 'Nine Lives,' Steve Turner, Los Angeles; with a forthcoming solo exhibition at the Nemeth Art Center, Park Rapids, MN. Recent group exhibitions include Loyal Gallery, LA; Art for Change, LA; Museu Inimá de Paula, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Jack Siebert Projects, LA; Alexander Berggruen, New York, NY; Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, GE; Berkshire Botanic Gardens, Stockbridge, MA.

Madeleine Bialke is a current Artist-in-Residence at the Nemeth Art Center in Park Rapids, MN, and was an AiR at North Western Oklahoma State University in 2018. She was awarded the John Walker MFA Painting and Sculpture Award in 2016. Her work is included in the collections of the X Museum, Beijing, the Zuzeum, Latvia, and the Nassima Landau Foundation. She lives and works in London.