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{JIN MEYERSON}

INTRODUCTION: *Notes on Process & Practice*

I was born in Incheon City, Korea in 1972, and was soon adopted into a Jewish-Swedish family from rural Minnesota. I spent my early, formative years in the American Midwest before pursuing an education in fine arts, receiving a BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1995, and an MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1997.

Soon after, in the late 90s, I started my career as a working painter in New York City. As luck would have it, a series of successful solo shows there allowed me to move to Paris around 2005. For the past eight years, however, I have lived and worked in Asia, shuttling back and forth between Seoul and Hong Kong for the most part, with brief stops for pop-up studios in Jakarta and Tokyo in preparation for exhibitions in those cities.

By any measure, it's been a lot of moving around. And while exile and displacement are not explicit themes or readily apparent in the "content" of my paintings, the sense of cultural vertigo I've experienced in getting acclimated to each of these cities definitely drives the sense of hallucinatory distortion at the core of my work. Since the beginning, visual distortion has been a practical way for me of both altering and seizing the viewer's perception (if only momentarily) to provide a dynamic temporal experience within the necessarily static confines of painting's two-dimensional reality. An enveloping experience, if all goes according to plan, with maximum visual gestalt. So perhaps it's unsurprising that I make large-format, deeply immersive paintings keyed to the hyper-modern dimensions of the mural, the billboard, and the jumbotron – the scale and aspect ratio of the urban built environment.

For the past twenty years, then, I have been increasingly focused on the nexus between optical perception and personal psychology, using CG technology in concert with classical oil painting techniques to

dramatize and heighten their intersection in the hopes of providing the viewer with exactly this kind of threshold, phenomenological moment – the Baroque on the brink, if you will. They see what I saw; they feel what I felt. The singularity of the original second. And so those initial sensations, the daily epiphanic disturbances that stick with me, are lodged in my memory’s hard drive as optical and kinetic residue: an ever-expanding sensory archive which then becomes the material substrate of my work. From vapor to vibration, all experiential data (along with its sketched and photographed research) is subsumed into a single frequency for future pictorial transference in the studio.

Practically speaking, I use analog hand-drawn sketches in tandem with various forms of imaging software to distort, stretch, invert, mirror, recolor, and otherwise assimilate layer upon layer of photographic source material in order to modulate the force, speed, and overall clarity in each of my paintings. Shortly after 2005, I started to distance myself from the bundled tools that come with branded software, and began manipulating my original sketches manually; most notably by printing them out and dragging or spinning those prints across the bed of a scanner. This has allowed me to improvise and finesse the same glitch effects as a seamless digital simulation of the same, while further refining the painting’s “personal signature” with the addition of these spontaneous, performative layers – the autographic authenticity that accrues to the symbolic value of the painting with mounting evidence of the gritty, authorial hand. The originality in the origin story, so to speak. Simply put, it’s a further attempt to privilege the automatic, redeem the static, get lost in the drift, move away from the machine.

And finally, a note on the subject matter in the photographs themselves. Typically imbued with a quasi-documentary impulse, I radically alter the initial photographs’ native tone and frequency – what the critic David Joselit calls “its texture of transmission” – lending it a mysterious valence designed to short-circuit (or, at least flush out into the open for further debate) popular biases that have persistently clung to received ideas regarding photographic originality, authenticity, copyright, and, in certain rare instances, photo-journalistic claims of historical veracity couched in the avowed impartiality of the witness himself.

Jin Meyerson
August, 2016

{DAVID C. HUNT}

*“You said there was no past, present, or future.
Only in our verbs. That’s the only place we find it.”*

- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

*“Never see a brother like me go solo
Laser, anesthesia, maze ya
Ways to blaze your brain and train ya.”*

- Public Enemy, *Welcome to the Terrordome*

WHICH CRISIS SHOULD YOU TRUST?

Distances unfurled across multiple meridians and time zones, expertly choreographed in a daisy-chain of precarious rafts and makeshift dinghies foundering in the South China Seas, bobbing if not bailing, drowning *and* waving. Trains became toys, terminally unhinged from their tracks, slouching perilously toward the bone-yard as Meyerson stood astride the rubble, taunting Mr. Mayhem, uncorking devouring genies, *rubbing battered Attic lamps*. Again and again, he saw them instinctively thrill to his paintings’ two-fold jolt in the neck: a recognition of the calamity itself – the death-grip gestalt, cunning and sentient, frozen in extremis – immediately coupled with an overwhelming sensation of powerlessness shot through with guiltless, emancipatory relief.

Absence made the heart grow fonder: no argument there – truth and law, ruling side by side, upon a throne of adamant. But what seemed to elude these bingers as they fed with equal gusto on both his first drip and the torrential downpour that was sure to come with it, was the sheer fact of a great distance having just recently granted your compassion a temporary reprieve. Oceans away in both conscience and

coordinates, every last one of them was flush with a sort of giddy, *get out of jail free*, newly-furloughed delight – the kind of ethical absolution which conveniently attends the confusion of proximity and proximate cause. Unphased grazers & weekend abstainers, thus emboldened by this emotional rescue, could hardly resist the urge to bend the nearest available ear with a practiced, conspiratorial wink, as if to say: “Sure, we were all connected. But we weren’t really *inter*-connected, you know what I mean?”

Though the mere retinal after-image of a Meyerson painting alone, divorced from the immediate specificity of its physical, tactile armature – from the kinesthetic drama of the painterly event – had long been known to leave one gasping helplessly in its swirling, granular fog, at the end of the day, who *couldn’t* embrace the generous impulse behind these welcome sensations of being let off the hook indefinitely; the cancellation of *that* psychic debt ?

PROSPECTORS & POTENTATES

Had they gotten a little too tender toward their own feelings, lately? These electric horsemen riding rapt through the valleys of their own obscure remote feeds, scouting for verifiable fact buried in marbled fat, sketchy with the historical longview, fated to turn up gristle. The hard-core bingers among them continued to slake their empathy fatigue with whatever scraps of his painting they could get their fidgety hands on, re-upping dwindling supply chains when collective, proverbial itch became shaky, intolerable scratch with whatever dressed up data-set turned out in sumptuous drag they just happened to dredge up from the deep dead web that day.

The best song wasn’t always the single, so one never knew whether the rippling mirage staring back at you from the screen – one or two or twenty times removed from the embodied singularity of his original painterly intent – was the aftershock of some earlier operating system’s slow, rumbling depreciation (of no longer being supported), or if Meyerson was just planning while you were playing, saving while you were spending. There were solo webcam séances with two-million hits beaming shame-waves to the masses; omens of ill winds and bad moons rising roiling beneath the molten surface of any number of his meticulous compositions in oil & acrylic just waiting to leap out at you like an angry jack-in-the-box, and

yet the total absence of any lingering, signature gesture implying volume, or even facture suggesting depth, evidently didn't seem to dampen the mob's enthusiasm for the pulse-quickenings pleasures of the hunt, factor even a little into their calculus of constant craving, curb their insatiable hunger one bit. *Stress & duress*: it was like fuel to them.

ARISTOTELIAN RETALIATIONS OF PURE FORM

Circa 2005, the normative lyrical ode passing for "content" in a quasi-abstract painting pinballed back and forth between placid lakes of feeling whose undisturbed, frictionless surfaces resisted *any* existential reverberation likely to exorcize one's hauntological ghosts (or cancel one's feelings of negative intimacy with his or her own body), on one hand; and, in heavy rotation on the opposing end of the spectrum, a Euclidean mania for every upcycled geometric form sliced & diced, teased & squeezed, cropped & inverted, and otherwise dutifully subjected to the crystal method's entire kaleidoscopic arsenal of Cubist fragmentation and multi-planar shuffling (thus giving the modernist master narrative that necessary shout-out). A tesseractual wrinkle in the space-time fabric of the canvas, as it were, whose resulting corralled "intensities" – superimposed upon other, not so dissimilar "intensities" – created the kind of generic, all-purpose, ambient interface harkening back knowingly to the first Industrial Revolution's *Poetics of Accelerated Steam-Driven Dispersion*, while simultaneously offering itself up in the here and now as an infinitely fungible Info-Age instrument of interior décor, par excellence. Pretty vacant, indeed.

Once upon a time, Ellsworth Kelly, the de facto global solutions leader and last word in all matters chroma & contrast related, declaimed with characteristic koan-like simplicity: "Color plus form is the content." And the success stories of this period, then as now, liked to think they drank from the same exalted cup. You know the drill: Roger Rectangle and Suzie Circle meet cute deep in the hollows of the Fractal Forest, trade compass for protractor in the ensuing blistering courtship, and – voila! – the Mathiverse's brittle, hard-edged scaffolding duly melts away in voluptuous, rose-colored surrender; dissolving much like a fist upon opening one's palm, to reveal . . . more math. Very complicated video games spring to mind. South Park's unrelievedly 2D aesthetic made a cameo. Both the plastic fantastic and a beige spectacular blandness, obtained – in a slack, not so suspenseful counterpoint. And as assorted trompe l'oeil terrorists

with a jones for 8-bit sci-fi tropes punctually arrived to split the bill on the abortion, the flash and fire of Meyerson's early shockwave xanadus in irradiated, hothouse hues made their climactic splashdown like the Sun to the proverbial Ra – the seismic tremble coursing through their surfaces mirroring an itchy trigger finger seemingly anxious to exercise the Truman Option; to blanket every gallery in a white-hot nuclear winter, blast radius be damned. Sleeper cells of centrifugal meaning steadily spun outward into the haute pockets of the newly-minted arriviste, setting cascading chains of custody in motion; gaining traction.

Smoke did not signal fire for Meyerson; it did not precede it. Rather, gusting solar winds lodged within the crease of the wreck signaled a self-immolating turn of mind within himself and the culture at large, a cruel lust for the epiphanic disturbance for its own obstreperous sake to ward off creeping ennui; *to keep shit real*. Jokers. Jackals. Mischief-makers with a grudge. Anarchic desublimation as longing and lifestyle choice shading darkly over time into an ominous, catastrophic veil on the brink. An urgent plea to be lifted, *coming from the veil itself*, in order to bring in the light. A sun-starved house, in other words, that needed to be brought down, leveled, razed.

NEW JACK CITY

At the joyless, antiseptic core of the prestige-granting milieus with which Meyerson was forced to traffic, the not-so-subtle coercion presented itself in the form of two options: He could wait patiently until his work became conscious of its own capture in the submissive circuits of casino capitalism; or, alternatively, he could actively cultivate cargo-cult circuses of such contrarian chutzpah that Hiroshima cashed its reparation check on the next half-life chapter. Those were the choices; I kid you not: frame your work rhetorically (the fruits of your labor) in such a way that it became “internet aware” or “internet awake” or otherwise underscored and valorized its greased passage from node to node (in the vaguely deathless vernacular, one assumes, of the undead ghoul rising if not fully tumescent); or, conversely, package your interiority (your private self) for future public performances in a full-throated, brand-building external vision statement chock-a-block with identity politics' faded markers and cues – but now writ large, so as to accommodate the twits & grams. Whichever came first – it was all so bandwagonesque! Phoenix or

Lazarus, take your pick, but make no mistake: you served the server, or *you got served*. It was death on the installment plan – by a thousand insults to the brain, and then some. The difference, such as there was, scarcely launched ships.

Over the course of a decade, then, in which Meyerson had seen the hip dollar chase various computational readymades robed in stealth velour (always skipping ahead to venerate the machine of their own delivery, morbidly fixated on the texture of transmission's exact, numerical thread count) – a decade, mind you, where if you were trying to core the Big Apple's bubble of participatory self-interest, he would have to come mightily correct and lose even the pretense of any illusions forged in a *Blazian Song of Fire & Ice* that foretold, say, a welcoming alternate universe whereby Humvees and High School football bought you a ticket to the big dance – a decade, more to the point, in which he became increasingly exposed to the tyrannical regime of *right mind, right thought, right action* imposed by the day's predominant aspirational protocols of taste, of collective consensus-building, allowing him to see for the first time how these merciless gatekeepers were about as likely to validate as subject matter a Pop-uncanny rogues gallery that might include a Lamborghini as they were to sign off on *The Lion King*.

Time passed. The zeitgeist continued to frustrate analogic conceit, settling on a Sphinx-like nowness. Narcissus vs. Prometheus superseded Alien vs. Predator as the prevailing antagonistic mythos, though protean recombinatory genius seemed to be getting the upper hand over those still prostrating themselves adoringly at the lip of the pool. Everything sped up (including speed itself) as the island began to lose the habit of truth, boomeranging incidentally now in the general, wobbly direction of some kind of truth-substitute – *a Splenda version of the truth*. Confronting Meyerson was a new species of hybrid fiction born of journalistic fact offering up grand, triumphal statements concerning the anomic state of affairs worldwide, many degrees and orders of magnitude beyond what one might consider *current events*, albeit slightly reductive in their totalizing impulses. Nevertheless, they resonated with his aerial, bird's-eye, “macro” sensibility and seemed to dovetail neatly with one-half of the doubled, crippling sensation that would later become the cynosure of his work.

If only, he thought to himself. At the same time, he sensed in their suggestive absences a hollow core of unearned gravitas, the notion that time was not your friend woven into their glacial winding-downiness

that put him in mind of all the other entropy emojis making the rounds these days, pedal-to-the-metal on their thermodynamic thrusters, doing donuts in the parking lot. Which, in his less generous moods, he had to admit, appeared to resemble intricate sand castles blowin' in the Baroque wind designed by Antoni Gaudi – but from the *Emporio A/G* line, not the really good stuff. An evacuated endgame or endgame as vacuum, he concluded, unlikely to thwart the prevailing at-a-glance aesthetic in contemporary painting given the potential viewer's instantaneous absorption of the “facts” or the “information” or the “algorithmic 411”. *If only*, he thought.

“CHAIN, CHAIN, CHAIN . . .”

Here was the world of industry and its abandoned industrial structures tarted up for the grave whose systems of scaled-out extraction and expansion alienated from big nature spoke to the banality of complexity and surely not the other way around; here was the processional formation of capital and the alleged ubiquity of its transnational flows couched in the visual rhetoric of the passive, disinterested documentarian – the fly on the crumbling cement wall – whose tone of concocted exuberance lent your thesis that exotic, mysterious valence which was pure catnip to the rating agencies. And here was Meyerson himself staring directly at Gursky or Burtynsky or whatever anonymous stringer from the Associated Press strapped with a telephoto lens who happened to turn out highly saturated bespoke infinitudes backlit by a mood of casual vastness and artless malaise. If the future is but the obsolete in reverse, as Nabokov had averred, then the rust truly *did not sleep* on these busted jalopies pulled out of retirement and given a new set of rims; these antique Wurlitzer's plucked from their pensions and Palm Beach homes and conscripted back into a slowly rotating, softly hissing, slightly warbling state of emergency preparedness to better serve as infantry in the *Ongoing Global Crisis In Disproportionate Capital Accumulation*, aka the truth between the haves and the have-nots. *If only* their compositional structure could be cloned & collapsed and perhaps thoroughly effaced, altogether?

If only their endlessly uniform, flat-as-a-Kansas-wheat-field vibe of detached & studied aloofness could be dialed up into something at least provocative enough to stir a sense of righteous indignation with a

snowball's chance of implicating us all in what had become, he had to be honest, a shameful moral slide. *If only* their subject matter offered that man-in-the-mirror moment of ruthless personal accounting likely to undermine our tendency to osmotically emote force-fields of well-being in the grim face of black sites and torture hotels.

If only their subject matter, well . . . *mattered*. And besides, hadn't Baldessari nailed it back in '67 with:

A TWO-DIMENSIONAL
SURFACE WITHOUT ANY
ARTICULATION IS A
DEAD EXPERIENCE

He just wanted to ask them: *Have you paid attention to the weather, recently? Been to outer space? Tasted the cold sucking vacuum of it? Spun headlong into its black brute coups?*

BIG BLUE MARBLE

Under the dirt-pearled dome of any of his studios over the past twenty years – from Jakarta to Brooklyn to Hong Kong to Paris to Seoul, and back again along the compass-spinning routes of his restless, migratory loop (the reason why “home” never synchs with the map; why home will always be a supernatural state of mind, a quantum blink in swinging actuality – *there/not there*) – Meyerson gingerly suspended whole Biblical swan songs in near-absolute equipoise like he was trying on different cosmic grins to see which one fit; engaging their irregular perimeters and swaddling the entirety of this concussed, atmospheric bruise into the cradle of his outstretched arms in order to pit “perpetual unfinished” against “perfect resolution” in an unholy deathmatch for the *Provisional Détente World Title*, unifying the belts and not even sweating the undercard.

You could throw a coat of suicide silver right on the side of the crate for good measure, slice the motherless burden of weight and mass on your shoulders into fine ribbons of sloughed confetti sourced from soft sieved feathers, and send it drifting for days like so many intimate, bottled messages destined

for the dead-letter office, but Meyerson – the orphaned architect of an origin story that had been told so many times it had become a story – considered himself the necessary first casualty in an unforgiving *Optical Inquisition* of his own thoroughly draconian devise, and so recommitted himself daily to recording every fugitive synapse of muscle memory personally expended on behalf of his paintings to deep storage, ensuring their right livelihoods, their gleaming weaponized tips. Some were heartless and some wore their hearts on their sleeve, but Meyerson would straight vomit the heart. Birth certificate or no birth certificate, he was simply too strong for too long – pound for pound and stroke for stroke punching way above his weight class.

He would cinch the puckered, dimpled center of whatever amorphous wraith wrapped in a loose burkha of hallucinatory shimmer loomed large before him in the studio that day – expectant, waiting, idling, revving. Trussed and bound and stretched across the rack & wheel of his fevered imagination (*limbs pinned back in customized stress positions*), he always made sure to leave room the size of a button for the obliging press of your finger. All the better to twist the resulting bow with a satisfying flourish, as one might fashion a particularly elaborate balloon animal into the vaguely tentacular shape of a multi-limbed Goddess of Destruction.

David C. Hunt

March, 2016

{ROBIN PECKHAM}

STACKS OF SCREENS AND LAYERS OF CANVAS: *Painting as a Social Practice and the Construction of the Image After the Ubiquity of Graphic Software*

Born in Incheon, South Korea in 1972, Jin Meyerson is an American artist currently based in Hong Kong after spending time working in New York, Paris, and Seoul. He received his BFA from Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1995, and his MFA from Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1997. Recognized for his integral contributions to the revival of figurative painting, he has been included in landmark exhibitions from “The Triumph of Painting” at the Saatchi Gallery to “Hue & Cry” curated by Vladimir Roitfeld. His work draws on the legacies of abstraction by reworking images drawn from the media, which he distorts, recolors, stretches, shrinks, and otherwise translates into the language of painting.

In the past two years it has become effective consensus, both reflexively in the critical literature and practically in the shared vernacular, that we have entered a moment of post-internet culture—a term that, like postmodernism, refers not to the surpassing or transcendence of its object but rather to its ubiquity and generalization. That is to say, the art of the present is produced, circulated, and received as much through networked mechanisms of reproduction and distribution as through the more traditionally established channels of contemporary art. One of the most fruitful conversations that has opened up within this historical period is that of the digital similitude of painting: as the ontological status of the painting approaches that of the photographic or graphic image, based primarily on its appearance on the computer or smartphone screen, the question of how digital software has approximated or otherwise represented painting has become intellectually compelling. Of course, and perhaps more exciting, this is a two-way street. Painting as a studio practice has become vastly more diverse in terms of media and

approach than the label would suggest in its own right, incorporating a broad range of devices and imaging techniques on which it both comments and builds versions of possible futures.

Jin Meyerson, who works unequivocally within the practice of studio painting, offers an unorthodox window into the recent history of this cultural evolution. Crucially, the artist operates what might be called a traditional studio, working with highly trained assistants to execute compositions in stages from a sketch and silhouette to working horizontally on texture and finally to the refinement of detail on a vertical surface. At each one of these junctures, however, the technological milieu of everyday image transmission plays a key role. Source images, eventually collaged into a combined composition of figurative and other imagery, are first located through a process of online archival image searches: for the two paintings *Broadacre* and *Arcosanti* (both 2013), organized around the decidedly classical visual theme of the tree of life, it is the twin categories of foliage and architecture that are located in this way. Unlike so many artists working with the idea of digital imagery in painting, Meyerson's process of selection is neither random nor particularly focused on its networked aspects; instead it is almost purely instrumental, and relies heavily on the eye of the painter in a much more traditional way. This allows his practice to build a visually expansive reality around imagery—almost generic—that allows for considerable leeway.

Produced in the megacity of Hong Kong, these works certainly take on the key questions of urban ecology between ancient trees and dense buildings in a way that almost mirrors the role of digital technology in manual painting, but seem to be more focused on this structure as a convention for the exploration of composition and image than on the potentially wider mythological connotations. In *Broadacre*, which conforms closely to a widescreen aspect ratio, rough branches that appear lush to the point of mouldering snake their way around a fiery rectangular void framed on all four sides by dense buildings typical of the Hong Kong street; fundamentally cinematic in composition and dominated by a surprising sense of narrative foreboding, the work deals explicitly with sensations of depth that produce layers of space between one image and the next. What originates in painting, what in photography, and what in digital drawing becomes immaterial here, as the artist reinterprets these various textures by refusing to pull them all into a single plane. Instead, it is the techniques of brushwork and coloration that recreate tiers of

the sublime, pushing some spaces into a seemingly endless abyss while allowing others to float violently to the surface.

Supporting the notion of the role of play and development throughout the course of composition and execution, Meyerson's practice does not involve a simply linear narrative process of the selection of an image and its production in painting. Instead, the composition varies drastically over time as the work is produced, and the sketch itself is subject to major alterations over time, often incorporating transitions that involve the repainting and realignment of entire segments of the original painting. This is possible because the artist conceives of each work—both pragmatically and conceptually—in terms of layers numbering in the dozens, at the very least. If this vocabulary seems reminiscent of Photoshop and other graphic design terminology, it certainly should. Meyerson was one of the earlier painters to engage with such software technologies in a rigorous way, and worked intensively with Photoshop manipulation techniques throughout the period 2001-2005. Work produced in those years often involves whirlpool and ripple effects for which the artist digitally edited the source images and sketches before executing these digital artifacts in paint. After the year 2005, in order to distance himself from the inbuilt tools of branded software, Meyerson began to produce a wider range of effects by manipulating his sketches manually, most notably by printing them and dragging or spinning the prints across the bed of a scanner, thus accomplishing similar glitch effects but tying them to performative actions rather than digital simulations of the same. In the epic piece *Before the Invention of Death* (2009-2010), for instance, urban forms are mashed together in a way that could, at first, seem almost random; when the human eye is able to see as a machine, however, one might be able to disentangle edges and lines such that imagery—albeit never original—becomes apparent. This is a form of abstraction that seeps out from the crevices where digital photography meets manual composition, recreating a fundamentally new image that diverges from both categories of source material.

The scanner intervention is notable in that it temporarily flattens out the multitude of layers built up before and rearticulated after the manual interruption. Meyerson's sketches, for instance, are built up in layers in Photoshop to begin with, including components of appropriated photographs and digital drawings produced in the studio. The scanned images of the prints, or particular sections thereof, can

then be inserted again into the sketches for further layering in Photoshop; while these layers are not necessarily applied individually when it is time for oil to meet canvas, the actual work of the painting is executed through an analogous structure of other layers that are individuated through a painterly eye instead of a designer's software toolbox. As a result, there are two distinct sets of layers at play in the final pieces, and it is these two "stacks" of images and techniques that constitute the life of painting as a contemporary genre in this body of work. Noted new media theorist Lev Manovich, having recently released his new publication *Software Takes Command*, might advocate here for the application of the novel theoretical rubric of software studies, dissecting layer by layer how Meyerson's paintings are built up in the conceptual spaces of Photoshop. For the artist, however, the project is much more nebulous, drawing as much on the traditions of the studio as from the innovative possibilities offered by computer technology. The work *Arcosanti*, created in a slightly more televisual aspect ratio—and indeed color palette—than its counterpart *Broadacre*, draws similarly on the contrast between the organic form of the tree and rectilinear architecture, but also utilizes the artist's scanner technique to surround the trunk of the tree with ribbons of pure interruption. While a forensic analysis of the image would not be impossible, ultimately what drives the work home is the punch of a fluorescent white alongside ultraviolet musculature, again calculating an effective thrust upwards into an empty vertical space.

When the work has reached a stage in the process of execution and repainting at which it has outgrown the status of the composition and instead lives as an organic entity in a position of flux between inhaling and exhaling, it can be finished and ultimately endowed with the label of painting, by which it will circulate in exhibitions, on the market, and eventually in collections. It is at this moment, ironically if appropriately, that the work is finally photographed, allowing it to also be transmitted online, across a range of screens and devices, and in print publications. The acceleration of this cycle, and what it means for practice in the studio, has become a major focal point for art criticism notably from Michael Sanchez and Gene McHugh; but while Meyerson is certainly aware of these effects on his work—actual or potential—he has made the decision not to make such questions of reproduction a factor in the compositional stage (by contrast, Sanchez observes amongst many artists interested in such questions a tendency towards monochrome or textural gray paintings). Instead, he prefers that the mediatic nature of his practice speak for itself: the resolution of the work, for instance, is constantly ambiguous, as the hand

of the painter filters any number of photographic and graphic digital images compressed and collaged into his sketches. Even more visibly, his palette, which is kept consistent throughout the process of production of the work, must interpret a diverse set of color profiles (including those exported from Photoshop) and ink tones (as scans are layered atop prints and even original drawings). Here the figure of the stack appears again, as Meyerson's painting is asked to speak for an entire assemblage of technologies from the studio inkjet printer to the digital camera and, ultimately, the offset printing press that produces the exhibition catalogue—in which images are, by tradition, calibrated to the colors of the original work rather than to any of its digital source images or later photographs.

As the sense of urgency in critical conversations around painting increasingly shifts to this territory of the digital, including aspects of both composition and circulation, Meyerson offers a plea for what painting represents in terms of the value of composition and material above and beyond the abstracted set of marks and maneuvers otherwise reified in the current discourse. By insisting on retaining certain traditions in terms of studio practice—not to mention a very particular threshold for what it means to select subject matter and use it to compose a picture plane—the artist is able to incorporate social aspects of painting into the medium's evolution into new conceptual territories, suggesting that the meaning of the genre lies not only in reference to color, line, texture, and material, but also in the formations of influence and discussion around these elements. The stakes are clear: that, for painting to truly play a role in ongoing thinking about media and image, its social nature must be respected.

Robin Peckham

August, 2013

{JASPER SHARP}

PLAYING THE RUSH

In an interview with his local Sag Harbor radio station in the late summer of 1950, Jackson Pollack was invited by journalist William Wright to discuss the controversy that surrounded his method of painting and its apparent rejection of historical convention. *“My opinion,”* Pollack answered, *“is that new needs need new techniques. And that modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements. It seems to me that the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture. Each age finds its own technique.”* Pressed by the interviewer, he went on. *“The modern artist is living in a mechanical age and we have a mechanical means of representing objects in nature such as the camera and photograph. The modern artist, it seems to me, is working and expressing an inner world – in other words, expressing the energy, the motion, and other inner forces.”*

More than half a century later, we find ourselves at a similar crossroads. The airplane, the atom bomb, and radio have been displaced by commercial space travel, a remote controlled war on terror, and the Internet, and the mechanical age of the camera by one of wireless high – technology, the possibilities of which we have yet to fully comprehend. Traces of the “modern” New York that confronted and subsequently embraced Pollock and his contemporaries have been obscured beneath the twenty-first century city that now stands in its place: a place whose 8 million inhabitants on any given day speak a hundred and seventy different languages, produce twelve million tons of waste, watch five hours of television, read thousands of billboard taglines, and spend what amounts to the second highest GDP per capita in the world. The New York of today is a multicultural metropolis of relentless activity and transformation, an insomniac reptile that sheds a different skin with each new dawn.

While the challenge that it presents to the painter has transformed and intensified accordingly, the essential question remains the same: how to trap and make sense of the forces that shape our existence within the limits of an inherently static medium. Many of the most pivotal and scandalous contributions to the history of modern painting – from Futurism through Dada to Pollock’s Abstract Expressionism – were themselves attempts to find the answer. Aggravated by short-sighted commentators who still line up to pen obituaries of the medium in a misguided effort to dismantle its supposed moral superiority, the challenge remains as complex and imposing today as it has ever been.

It is perhaps on this context that the work of Jin Meyerson should be approached and considered. Even if a large part of his subject matter – drawn initially from the reservoir of Americana and latterly from a richer, more universal source – is not specific to the urban location, he is, first and foremost, a chronicler of contemporary life. As such, he contrives to bridge the gap between the two distinct models that Wright and Pollock discussed: the classical artist who represented his world through its objects and the modern artist who represented his world through the effects its objects had upon him. Those objects that define our own age – vehicles, athletes, iconic buildings, rescue workers – are strewn across Meyerson’s canvases. Having come to rest, they are seized, manhandled, and subsumed to varying degrees within a disfiguring maelstrom of experience precisely of their own making.

Since he began painting, Meyerson has routinely culled source material from printed media, a compulsive practice based on rapid visual stimulation in the same vein as surfing television stations or browsing the Internet. Sometimes they are single images, sometimes several different images collaged together. Either way he removes them from their original context and takes them to pieces. Their constituent parts, or at least the most interesting ones, are carefully reorganized, reanimated, and restored to public like a corps of contemporary Frankensteins. The twin axes within which they are conceived to operate, and on which Meyerson’s entire oeuvre to date has been based, are those of space and time. Exploring the possibilities of parallel simultaneity, he collapses multiple perspectives of the same single event – a moment in a football game, for example, seen live from the touchline, at home through live high-definition cable, or months later on the page of a magazine – into a solitary, shuddering whole.

Both the subject matter and the technique of Meyerson's earlier works are characterized by a jolting, hyperactive motion. Tides of deliberately jarring colour – cotton candy pinks, indigos, peppermint greens – flood the pictures' surfaces and appear constantly to shift. This in turn creates a playing field for competing and simultaneously operative energies: depth and depthlessness, the concave and the convex, the abstract and the figurative. At times one clearly senses that the latter pair are in fact working in tandem, flirting with the central premise of José Ortega y Gasset's 1925 polemic "The Dehumanization of Art" which proposed that the quality of art is based primarily on its form rather than its content.

The paintings certainly don't give themselves up without a fight. Their contents are athletically distorted, like conversations scrambled to keep them from unintended ears. Attempts to reconstitute the original images are invariably futile, for each trail of color, each slick of paint, seems only to lead back to itself. Unlike those simplistic, painterly experiments with anamorphosis, they never do regain any regular shape or proportion, and nor are they intended to. The most successful compositions are those with no real compositional centrality; they pull the viewer's eye back and forth across the picture surface in search of some kind of visual foothold. In this respect, at least, they recall the choreographed wanderings of Pollock, or even the hard – edged lattice work of the man who first discovered him, Piet Mondrian.

An exhibition at Zach Feuer's New York gallery in early 2006, Meyerson's second one-person showing there, marked something of a sea change in the painter's work. The self-consciousness – an inescapable and many would argue necessary factor in any young artist's development – suddenly dissolved. His painting adopted a more direct approach, as if the lens of a microscope, under which his subjects had until that point been examined, dissected, and individually reconstituted, had been calmly screwed back to reveal a larger and altogether more complex picture. The air was cleared and the blistering pace brought under control. With it, a great deal of the pressure that has gripped the canvases also lifted. The visual platter that he had served up in those seven paintings, most of them huge, was as rich as anything he had prepared to date. Their complexity and attention to detail required time and sustained observation on the part of the viewer, who was confronted with a multiplicity of techniques laying down paint and a coexistence of media that went beyond acrylic and oil on canvas to include encaustic, charcoal and Indian ink, each applied with a crucially differentiated hand.

Meyerson's work has, since the beginning, transmitted a clear sense of urgency. The willfully aggressive choice of subject matter and extreme nature of his early palette – psychedelic, sometimes Day-Glo hues that each scream louder than the next – were harnessed to convey a message of alarm and discomfort. The artist's candid use of digital software to build and structure his first body of work opened it to interpretation as a critique of the stranglehold saturation of media advertising and the menacing reach of technology into each and every aspect of our daily lives. Recently, however, his painting has gravitated toward a more universal and threatening sense of the catastrophic. Natural and man-made disasters, from flooding and human exodus to train wrecks and fallen buildings, proliferate in his work. Their portrayal is often distorted by the turbulent inclusion of a vortex, a lingering remnant from his earlier work that convinces the viewer that the scene unfolding before him is being pulled into something against its will. Furthermore, the artist's simultaneous pillaging from the histories of art and architecture suggests that it is civilization as a whole that is being damned.

It brings to mind, in conclusion, a short statement made by Yves Klein in 1958, at a new dawn of political, military, technological, and scientific development. *“One must – and this is not an exaggeration – keep in mind that we are living in an atomic age, where everything material and physical could disappear from one day to another, to be replaced by nothing but the ultimate abstraction imaginable.”* In the company of Jin Meyerson's work, we seem never to be too far away.

Jasper Sharp

August, 2007

{AMANDA COULSON}

VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR: THE MEYERSON PARADOX

I.

When alien, Thomas Jerome Newton, encounters the human world in Nicolas Roeg's 1972 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, he attempts to absorb the culture by watching a huge wall of screens broadcasting a variety of channels. He surrenders, in torment, before the cacophony of information, later pronouncing that television shows everything about life on earth but reveals none of its true mysteries.

A visit to Jin Meyerson's Paris studio reveals a similar struggle to understand the human situation through the absorption of media images. Whereas Newton – an advanced being stranded on a still-analog earth – watches twelve televisions simultaneously, Meyerson surrounds himself with photographs torn from newspapers: images of disaster, famine, political upheaval and even crowds of paparazzi, pushing and shoving to record the latest developments. He scans, combines, and digitally manipulates his source pictures in an epic format. In the extraction, consideration, and reconveyance of multitudinous images, Meyerson's work provides what Newton was searching for: the space and stillness for the viewer to engage fully with a Pandora's box of earthly enigmas blasting out helter-skelter.

II.

The launching of MTV in 1981 inaugurated a new way of seeing, as music videos taught the American public how to receive multilayered moving images. Advertising and television quickly adapted MTV's signature high-speed splicing and cutting, that today it seems entirely normal to watch a split screen that interpolates news, ads, and stock updates with a traditionally linear narrative feature in the background.

Appropriately the first music video broadcast on MTV was the Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star," a trashy but catchy song that foresaw the end result: a generation raised on bytes. These were not human versions of Newton, intelligent enough to digest huge amounts of information and sensitive enough to

react to the onslaught, but rather quite the opposite: people of limited attention span, unable to focus and numb to much of what passes before their eyes.

While many might glimpse the images Meyerson utilizes on the front page of CNN, it is unlikely that the masses consider them thoroughly enough to perceive any fundamental meaning. Through the visual distortion of such images, however, Meyerson creates a kind of meditative mandala through which viewers must slowly proceed, a soothing process that enables us to move beyond the explosion of color and form and to extract an essential meaning and force.

III.

In 1819 the twenty-five year old painter Théodore Géricault attracted both passionate praise and condemnation with his monumental work *The Raft of Medusa*. Since 1667, when André Félibien classified the hierarchy of artistic genres, history painting had been considered the *grand genre*, suitable only for depicting classical themes. Although realized on the epic scale of a history painting, Géricault's thoroughly modern composition marked the first time in France that an artwork was based on a current news story, and it endowed the event with historical importance by sheer virtue of its size.

Meyerson's canvases also tend towards the massive, inviting the question of whether the artist is deliberately seeking through shock and awe, as Géricault had. His answer, however, is more humble than his canvases might suggest. Referring to his reuse of journalistic imagery, he comments: "I'm just the clown in the circus who picks up after the elephants. I don't aim to be political, only relevant to the moment." Maintaining that, "painting is inherently historical", he insists that an artists' motivation should be the events of his time; living in what he describes as a hotbed of violence, turmoil, and population explosion, he has no recourse but to memorialize the images that compose our daily grist. Unwittingly paraphrasing Oscar Wilde ("Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it"), Meyerson maintains that history is generated daily and that only time and hindsight can validate whether any painting has real importance – and therefore if an artist will be confirmed as a "great man" or history painter.

There are, above all, times in which human reality, always mobile, accelerates, and bursts into vertiginous speeds. Our time is such a one, for it is made of descension and fall.

IV.

In his 1930 book *The Revolt of the Masses*, José Ortega y Gasset stated the following: “{The} faculty of wonder is the delight refused to your football ‘fan’, and, on the other hand, is the one which leads the intellectual man through life in the perpetual ecstasy of the visionary. His special attribute is the wonder of the eyes.” Meyerson’s wonder of the eyes is what draws him to images of extraordinary configurations. It is not a macabre fascination with disaster, but rather the visual enthrallment of a zig-zag of train cars piled upon one another, or the sea of human bodies pressing together at a rally or refugee camp. He insists that to read his work as some kind of post-September 11 trauma is off track, and indeed his focus is not so much on destruction and on the errors of human society as on sensation and adrenalin produced by certain images of daily experience. Meyerson’s earlier work used warping and deformation to approach apolitical fields of architecture and sports – as in 2003’s *Untitled (Rangers)* or 2004’s *Untitled (ATV)* – and it was not as recently as 2005, not immediately after the collapse of the Twin Towers by any means, that an epic devastation began to appear in works such as *Landfall* and *Tower*.

His obsession is not with the subjects he paints but rather with humanity’s obsession with those subjects, as well as their vast consumption of them. Like Newton, he watches us, noting our obsessions and recording what fascinates us, whether that is peak performance in sport, political upheaval, or the latest newsworthy tragedy. In recognition of Ortega y Gasset’s belief that the fascination of the masses may not translate into ecstatic contemplation. Meyerson turns disposable images into contemporary altarpieces that ask us to consider the fragility and passion of humanity.

V.

Ortega y Gasset’s reference to our vertiginous and accelerated “descension and fall” seems a direct description of the vortex so often seen in Meyerson’s later paintings, a whirlpool that consumes collapsed buildings (*Untitled, 2006*) and pulls at crashed trains (*Utopia Averted, 2006*). In 2007’s *Waterline*, the dark eye of a human hurricane is in fact the watering hole around which refugees fight for space to draw

up the life-giving fluid, while in *New Pilgrims* (2007) their bodies, faces, and outstretched arms yearn towards the promise of deliverance inherent in the curved ribs of a Viking ship. Yet this is a relatively recent device, which seems to have been built up over time, like the typhoon whose winds and clouds gather and gain force.

Earlier paintings, such as 2004's *Softshot*, disfigured more in the manner of a fairground house of mirrors, accentuating the sense of wonderment and even amusement to be found at the work's origins. Good old-fashioned television distortion, as in *Prometheus Versus the Prime Directive* (2003), grew into far more complex, collaged images, such as 2006's *Floodplain*, in which a fallen telegraph pole breaks into the picture plane, or 2007's *Family Tree*, where upturned branches appear as roots, both separating and connecting the seemingly disconnected buildings, people, and highways. Collapsed or demolished buildings form the backdrop for antlike figures – some portrayed in a photorealist, black-and-white newsprint style, like the fireman in *Untitled* from 2006, and others as brightly glowing humanoid light-bulbs in neon hues, as in *First Day* (2006) – picking their way through melting walls and burned cars. They scurry about, trying to rebuild, rescue or even change the world. And here lies the paradox: though abounding in death and catastrophe, Meyerson's meticulously and brilliantly painted world is infused with hope and love. There is love in the excessively detailed grain of wooden beams, interpreted as a psychedelic drip painting; in the textures and faces differentiated through his variety of media, which ranges from encaustic and acrylic to delicate ink drawings; and in the artist's evident wonderment that we continue to strive and battle against forces beyond our control.

Even in the saddest of images, such as his latest work, *New Pilgrims*, he sees the flow of desperate people not as a flood of refugees to be dammed or damned, but rather as adventurers with the courage to set sail and find a new land where they might start again. Meyerson wonders at the tenacity and surprises us by rendering them with virtuoso brushwork. And to wonder and be surprised is finally to see the mystery and begin to understand.

Amanda Coulson

August, 2007

{JEFF RIAN}

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

So much happens in a Jin Meyerson painting that looking at them requires a kind of relaxation technique, slow breathing, concentration. . . something. Big hallucinatory cityscapes, up to three meters on a side are pieced together from found images that are manipulated by computer and are projected and painted on canvas. The results are multifaceted overall textures (overall in the painter's sense of covering a surface entirely) with sections visually warped using computer graphics that are as startling to look at as their subjects are to think about: Violent train wrecks and collapsed or destroyed buildings. But a closer look reveals a deeper subject concerning the problem of painting in a world of computers and network communications.

A pictorial ground, almost like drawing, is painted using very narrow brushes and India ink the color of newsprint. Graphical figures in Day-Glo-colored jump-suits vaguely reminiscent of Keith Haring characters, climb around the urban havoc. The structures and many visual effects are painted in styles drawn from fifty years of abstract art – the daubs, drips, smears and splashes of abstract expressionism; the chemical sprays of graffiti art; the whorls and swirls of computer imaging – which he applies with the patience of a Buddhist driven to radical ambitions, one of which is to suggest the possibilities of painting in the current zeitgeist of compressed and instant information; a world wrecked by conflict and natural calamity. His synergetic surfaces emulate video games and the glassy shallowness of computer screens, while the collage style recalls artists like James Rosenquist, or even David Salle. But Malcolm Morley, who also painted train wrecks and scenes of disaster, and who combined different styles, also comes to mind. Meyerson achieves a different but related effect by combining techniques and styles into a visual tapestry of painterly details for which the overall subject is in some ways like a mask.

In *Family Tree*, 2006 (whose subject is a Beirut-like urban horror with an arterial form ripping through like a God's wrath), along with rubble, carefully painted in India ink, the sky, a building façade, and the arterial tree roots are rendered in a heavy impasto, over-painted with drips and brushwork. These painterly patterns, though not immediately noticeable, comprise a story about the painting process, while the overall subject strikes at the heart of the computer-oriented imagination – layers of styles built up to create a picture of the present.

Jeff Rian

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