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‘Everything in Between’: Joshua Meyer paintings

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Massachusetts painter Joshua Meyer, who uses a palette knife to create works he has referred to as collapsed time, says his works are explorations of the nature of experience filtered through the medium of painting - of how events that occur over days, weeks and months become individual layers on a canvas. The very concept of time, as it is represented in Meyer's oeuvre, is chaotic, unwieldy and not necessarily linear.

"If I were in a band, there would be a drummer, marking time with rhythm," he says. "If I were making films, images would flow as the seconds marched on. But instead, I am frighteningly free of the flow and order of time." In his works, "orderly rhythms fly out the window, ideas move at their own pace and contradictory rhythms overlap and intertwine." Some of Meyer's works are also subtle commentaries on the practice of painting, such as "Dislocated," which he embarked upon while he was having problems with the shoulder of his painting arm.



Joshua Meyer's "Dislocated" was begun at a time when he was having shoulder trouble and completed with a new outlook after surgery

"I worked at the painting for months, and then finally put the painting aside when I had surgery on that shoulder. Six awful weeks passed - I was losing my mind because I wasn't able to paint. And then I picked up the painting right where I left off. Except the facts were different, my arm was different, and my entire relationship to the painting and the fear and the pain were changed."

The result of Meyer's painstaking experience is stunning. Featuring a textured palette that resembles an intricate stratum of autumn leaves, the painting's final jigsaw piece is the shadowy imprint of a man in the background - an image that weaves a compelling and meditative chronicle of the beginning, middle and end of Meyer's shoulder troubles. Much like Meyer's complex layers of paint, contradictory ideas and emotions accumulate on his canvases, and the resulting tension is connected to the process of struggling, searching, getting lost and re-emerging.

"It's also about the relationship between the artist and the model, and of course, it is about the relationship between the painting and you, the viewer," Meyer says. "The tensions, frictions, reverberations, complications, electricity, resonance and dissonance in relationships." Given Meyer's artistic interest in Judaism and creation, as well as his conceptual engagement with light, it is appropriate that his show opens on the second day of Hanukkah. "On Hanukkah we remember that the ancient Temple had been destroyed," he says. "Everything is in ruins and a state of utter chaos - not dissimilar from the way many of my paintings emerge. But then the story pivots when the Maccabees are able to find enough oil to keep a simple light burning. Hope returns. The story pivots as vision is restored."

Light, to artists, is obviously an important element, one that Meyer says allows us to understand and make sense of our world. To Meyer, the symbolism of the eight lights of the menorah is vital to people of faith: "They alter the way we see the world and change the way we understand our lives. Nothing will ever look the same again."

Reception 5:30 p.m. today. Through Jan. 30. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tues.-Fri., 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat.
Dolby Chadwick Gallery, 210 Post St., Suite 205, S.F. (415) 956-3560.
www.dolbychadwickgallery.com.