

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

*byt.*

INTERSECTIONS': LINN MEYERS

I once had a professor who was fixated on the idea intertext. At first, it seemed to me to be just a glorified form of comparing and contrasting, but eventually he sold me. What kinds of new meaning – real, original meaning not found in the constituent parts – arises out of taking two pieces of writing/art/film/whatever and watching them to collide? How is the sum greater than the collected parts? And once we see these new meanings, can we ever see the individual parts the same way again? Currently on view at the Phillips Collection is a series of works that revolve around the idea of intertextuality. The project, called Intersections, brings contemporary artists into the museum to stage interventions in the space in response to works in the permanent collection. Various artists have engaged past masters such as Piet Mondrian, Mark Rothko, Eugene Delacroix, and Paul Cézanne. Perhaps the most striking work in this series, however, is Linn Meyers's *at the time being*, a sprawling vortex of a painting spread across a large wall in the second floor galleries. The piece responds to an 1889 Van Gogh, *The Road Menders*, engaging it with careful color choice and a visual simulation of the master's surface quality. Both pieces are activated by the lines which constitute their forms, and both have a shifting, swirling quality. *at the time being* is on display only until August 22 (when it will be PAINTED OVER! Gone!), so be sure to stop by the Phillips to see it before it's gone for good. I recently talked to the artist about the wall painting, Van Gogh, and site specificity.

BYT: When I look at the piece the first thing that flashes through my mind is how hypotic it is to look at, but also how hypnotic is must have been to create. Can you tell me a little about the process and how the action of putting the paint on the wall functions into the end result?

Linn Meyers: Okay, let's see. How can I talk about that...

BYT: What was the process like developing it?

LM: Well I did some preparatory drawings, which were small, about 8"x10". They were based on some preliminary conversations that I had with the curator. In general when I make preparatory drawings for something like this they don't reflect what the piece looks like in the end; they're just a way for me to begin to work through some of the loose ideas that I might have about the space more than the actual image and how to address the space. I did those drawings and then I went into the space to get started and promptly abandoned some of the things that I didn't like in the drawings, but held on to the basic composition that forms each of the circular images on either side.

Uyeda, Gan. "Intersections': Linn Meyers." *Brightest Young Things*, August 17, 2010.

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I mapped out the center point for each of the sides before I got started, you know as a compositional basis. After I finished the first side I changed the center point for the other side. Actually after I finished the first side I considered painting over it, mostly for compositional reasons, although I wasn't really sure about the way the drawing itself looked. It was more about thinking I had made some pretty dramatic mistakes in how I had wound up composing the piece to begin with.

BYT: Is that why the two sides, compositionally, are different?

LM: Well, I wanted them to be different. I finished the right side first, and I didn't like the way it was so weighted down. But I decided to just forge ahead, and that's why I changed the foci on the left side. And then I changed the composition of what I call the matrix, the initial driving force that creates the way the image develops. You know, there's that series of circles – have you watched that video?

BYT: Which video is this?

LM: They did a video that shows the process of the piece developing. It shows a lot of how the piece developed and what my process is. You know what? Why don't you take a couple minutes and look at it and call me back. It might change the questions that you've prepared.

BYT: That was great.

LM: Good, yeah I tried to keep it brief but answer some general questions.

BYT: One thing that interested me was when you said that if there's a moment when the piece is completed, it's not when it's torn down, but when you finish the drawing. It seems to me that the piece almost strays into performance art territory in that way.

LM: Yeah, it does, doesn't it? It wasn't intended that way, because it really is not a public thing that I'm doing as far as the process is concerned. But it does end up having some parallels with performance art.

BYT: The documentation left over after.

LM: Yeah, yeah.

BYT: The piece comes from this Intersections project at the Phillips. Why did you choose to respond to this Van Gogh?

LM: I don't know. I was going through this book that they have, a listing of all the works that they own. That piece just struck me as something that I care about from an artistic perspective. There's any number of things I could have chosen. I'm glad I chose that because I learned a lot about that particular piece. I understand the Van Gogh process differently now. There's already so much there that I wouldn't say directly impacted my work, but aspects are definitely there in my work that relates to what he did. Now I understand his paintings as drawings, and I think that's part of why they seem to hold the kind of energy that I think of drawings as often having.

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The energy – I don't like using the word energy – the sort of intensity that can come from a direct touch, an unmediated, very direct touch. Nobody would call Van Gogh a drawing artist, everybody would call him a painter, but there's something about the way that he painted that's more like a drawing.

BYT: Do you hope that framing the Van Gogh with your work will give viewers different perspectives on it? What kind of dialogue do you see between the two?

LM: I think there's a visual dialogue there that doesn't really need to be stated, that's just there. When you look the pieces together you see a simpatico. But I wouldn't venture to try to educate anyone on what they're looking at in terms of the painterly qualities or the process. I guess I feel that there's something about understanding permanence and impermanence that is happening. Having a piece that's time limited in a place like the Phillips that's all about preserving important work. That's more what I expect people might glean from it, in those cases I would think that it would be unconscious. Maybe not, but...People seem to have very intense reactions to the fact that the piece will no longer be visible. And I think that's just about our tendency to not want to let go of things.

BYT: You've taken on site-specific work in the past. What is it about that medium that interests you?

LM: Well, there're a lot of things. One is the architectural element: making space one of the materials that I work with, responding to a space that's already there (although sometimes I create it). Just having an opportunity to work it...I guess you could say that the impermanent element in the work is also one of the materials that I'm working with. To make a drawing and then destroy it is a totally different thing than having something that's part of a space but then goes away. To me that's a really special opportunity.

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*at the time being* is on display only at the time being! It will be painted over by the museum on August 22, 2010, so make sure to head down the Phillips Collection to see it before it's gone for good.

UPDATE: Turns out that all you fans of *at the time being* might get one last time to see the piece after August 22 (the date marks its official closing to the public and not, in fact, its painted demise). The work will be painted over around August 30, so patrons of the August 26 Phillips After 5 will get to enjoy it once again before it's gone.