



**JACOB MELCHI**

selected paintings

commentary by  
Gladys-Katherina Hernando

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Southern California-based Jacob Melchi, who for some time was best known as the studio assistant of prominent artist Charles Arnoldi, has in recent years emerged in his own right as one of Los Angeles' strongest younger painters.

Melchi practices a highly sensate yet logical painting, a discipline with geometry at its bones and the physicality of paint application as its flesh. Melchi handles oil paint with a predilection for the medium's tactile quality and ability to preserve the history of its own making beneath successively applied layers. His process is iterative; he builds his image from the back forward with exhaustive revision, leaving a visible trace like a trail of breadcrumbs, of the painting's course to its eventual coalescence. He draws on references to the outside world such as baseball and freshly mowed lawns, and weaves these impressions into a grid-based organization. The result is an articulate and nuanced visual grammar, one that relies on close attention to such subtleties as the grain of his chosen support, usually a rough weave linen, and the viscosity of his oil medium. Melchi leverages to great effect slight biases and obliques off the regular weave of his grid, and slight shifts and stops in his stroke. He extends the ways and means of historical constructivism, triggering abstract associations while grounding his work in concrete experience.

Relatively modest in scale, these canvases nevertheless hold the wall with authority, and engage the viewer on every level with a hybrid interplay that is at once formal, symbolic and improvisational. Jacob Melchi paints with an immediacy and vitality that places him at the crest of this perennial art form's current resurgence.

George Lawson

San Francisco, November 2014



## SERIAL LANGUAGE IN THE WORK OF JACOB MELCHI

*...The seam of two edges, the interstices of bliss, occurs in the volume of the languages, in the uttering, not in the sequence of utterances: not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover... – Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text*

To make abstract paintings today is to negate the preference of representation in favor of a stoppage—to open up the space of the imaginary amongst the spectacle. The world in which we exist is composed of representational images, overflowing with an inconceivable amount of information. In order to counteract the proliferation of this type of cultural production, the artist Jacob Melchi deploys various strategies to explore how abstract painting can reduce the pace of visual consumption. Melchi's process—seriality, color, form, and intention—allow him to compose and execute painting as a return to the realm of prolonged contemplation. The shift from consumption to experience is heightened in the activity of looking, giving the viewer a momentary pause from the surrounding chaos. By rejecting the spectacle of representation in favor of abstraction Melchi transforms painting into an imaginative experience that aestheticizes how the world feels rather than how it looks.

Working slowly and diligently over the past ten years, Melchi has developed active processes that bring complexity and meaning to the act of painting. The first element involves an engagement with language and its relationship to the viewer. Using the colors indigo and yellow as the crux of his color palette, Melchi begins his paintings in the same way. These two distinct colors—yellow, a primary, and indigo, a quaternary color—combine to create a connection based in language: “I” in indigo to represent the “I” of the artist, and “Y” in yellow to represent the “you” of the viewer. This simple system establishes a connectivity, though unspoken, between the artist and the spectator that links the work to the outside world. From there, Melchi begins a repetitive and serial process, building the colors upon themselves to invent new combinations, textures, and layers. The works assemble into a structure that challenges the experience of looking, demanding a pause of another type of proliferation—abstract seriality.

Working in series of four, six, or eight, Melchi approaches painting as a serial production. Essentially making the same painting again and again with subtle changes each time, his process unites the paintings through their similarities as much as their differences. Most prominent in the sixties, serial painting was a conceptual framework that allowed for the deployment of a structure to form a continuum or series of constellations between works. In the potential for endless production, process became a way to develop a single form into an infinite number of possibilities. For Melchi, seriality is another way to duplicate language, constructing four, six, or eight paintings into a sentence—subject/verb/article/object—to be read in multiple directions. As much as serial painting was fundamental to activating an unlimited capacity for meaning, this process was exhausted by the likes of artists such as Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland, resulting in the rejection of seriality in favor of the discrete object. Melchi's commitment to this structure substantiates both his own working method and, once again, that of the viewer, asking what is the nature of experience. In this way, serial painting was fundamental to activating a space to explore perception and meaning in the work.

Starting with the specific colors indigo and yellow, Melchi explores the potential of his process to exercise the act of painting itself. With the application of additional colors over the indigo and yellow—sometimes opposing—he creates an illusive optical effect. There is no first or last painting, only the variables of color and layering between each, as in *Long Linen (Indigo)*, 2014 [p. 23] where underneath a large white diamond, angled lines reveal traces of orange and blue peering from underneath. Surrounding the diamond is a large area of indigo with visible brush strokes in two opposing directions so as to appear under shifting light. Optically, the painting vibrates with the movement of the artist's hand while these various effects give the viewer areas in which to visually explore mark making and the deliberate use of color that has been obscured from sight. This obfuscation decelerates the experience of the work, allowing it to become a tool to evoke time, place, mood, and experience. In the piece *Cheddar* 2014 [p. 27] Melchi splits the canvas vertically with a diagonal line. This line exposes a spectrum of colorful underpainting that has been denied by coats of opaque yellow and yellow-green paint. This final cover produces a depth and a distance in the work while allowing a visual escape hatch through a diagonal window. These paintings, from separate series, carry many consistencies between them. The color structure is produced and obscured in a way that

magnifies an actual sense of time, repetition, and ultimately, of observed knowledge in the visibility of Melchi's decision making process.

Furthering this experience are the various compositional layers that allow for the recognition of complexity just under the surface of the painting. While the indigo, yellow, and their amalgam converse, Melchi divides the canvas into various sections of intersecting lines and shapes that form geometric units. These shapes become passageways to glimpse arrangements of color beneath heavy over-painting, yet they dominate and rupture the compositional space of the paintings. Though they may first appear to be hard edge paintings—masked off with tape to produce rigid lines—these edges are soft and hand made, giving an organic quality to otherwise flat and deep spatial divisions. In the push and pull of background, middle ground, foreground, and repeating over four, six, or eight iterations, Melchi generates a conversational mood based in color, space, subject, and the engagement of the viewer.

The last element that influences the perceptual reading of Melchi's work are his titles. Not merely the names of paintings or things, Melchi's titles disclose his intention, but also his experience of painting the paintings. With the slightest noun or verb, Melchi opens another route into his work, *untitled (Salvage)*, 2014 [p. 39] or *Crutch (Violet)*, 2014 [p. 15]—allowing for the reading and negotiation of these non-representational images to become objects of contemplation. Melchi exposes that the paintings are not merely a physical performance of gesture but are inspired by the texture and awareness of everyday life. From the subtle grays on the side of an abandoned building to the pattern of cut grass on a baseball field, the paintings arise from the most benign observation to deliberate moments of consideration and develop into non-pictorial depictions of the space we inhabit.

Through these structures and processes, Melchi confronts the inclination of images to overwhelm or overstate. He presents a polemic against the increase in visual information by disrupting and decreasing the viewing process. By developing a language in the structure of his work, Melchi speaks to the viewer without sound, without words, to release their inner dialogue and relationship to our contemporary environment.

Gladys-Katherina Hernando  
Los Angeles, October 2014

**Crook, 2014**  
oil on linen  
19 x 15 in. (48.26 x 38.1 cm)  
cat. no. JAM48



*Crutch (Violet)*, 2014  
oil on linen  
19 x 15 in. (48.26 x 38.1 cm)  
cat. no. JAM49



**Yaw 1, 2014**  
oil on linen  
19 x 15 in. (48.26 x 38.1 cm)  
cat. no. JAM50



*Long Linen (Noise)*, 2014  
oil on linen  
36 x 26 in. (91.44 x 66 cm)  
cat. no. JAM53



*Long Linen (Stripes)*, 2014  
oil on linen  
36 x 26 in. (91.44 x 66 cm)  
cat. no. JAM54



*Long Linen (Indigo)*, 2014  
oil on linen  
36 x 26 in. (91.44 x 66 cm)  
cat. no. JAM55



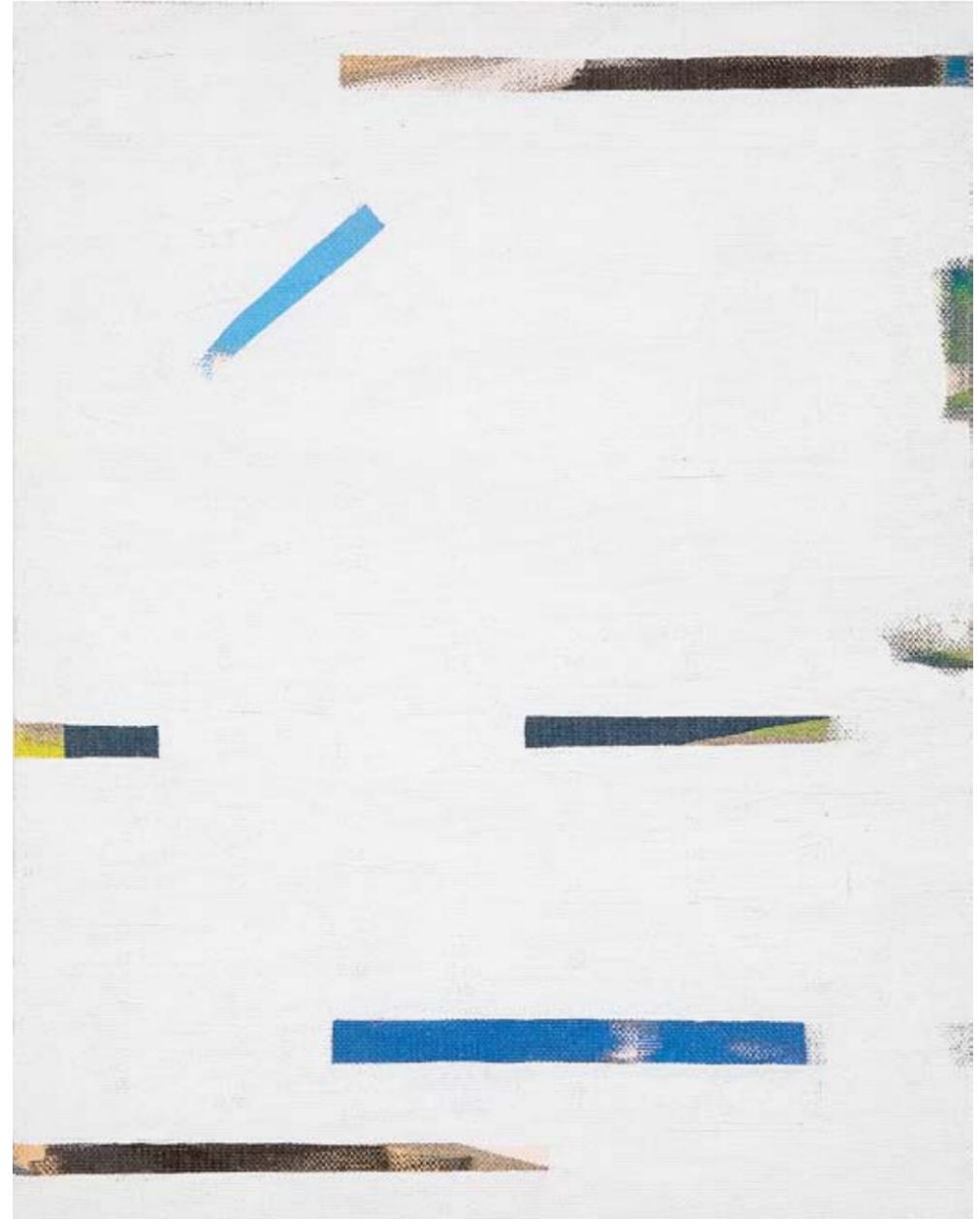
*Clinic*, 2014  
oil on linen  
21 x 18 in. (53.34 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM67



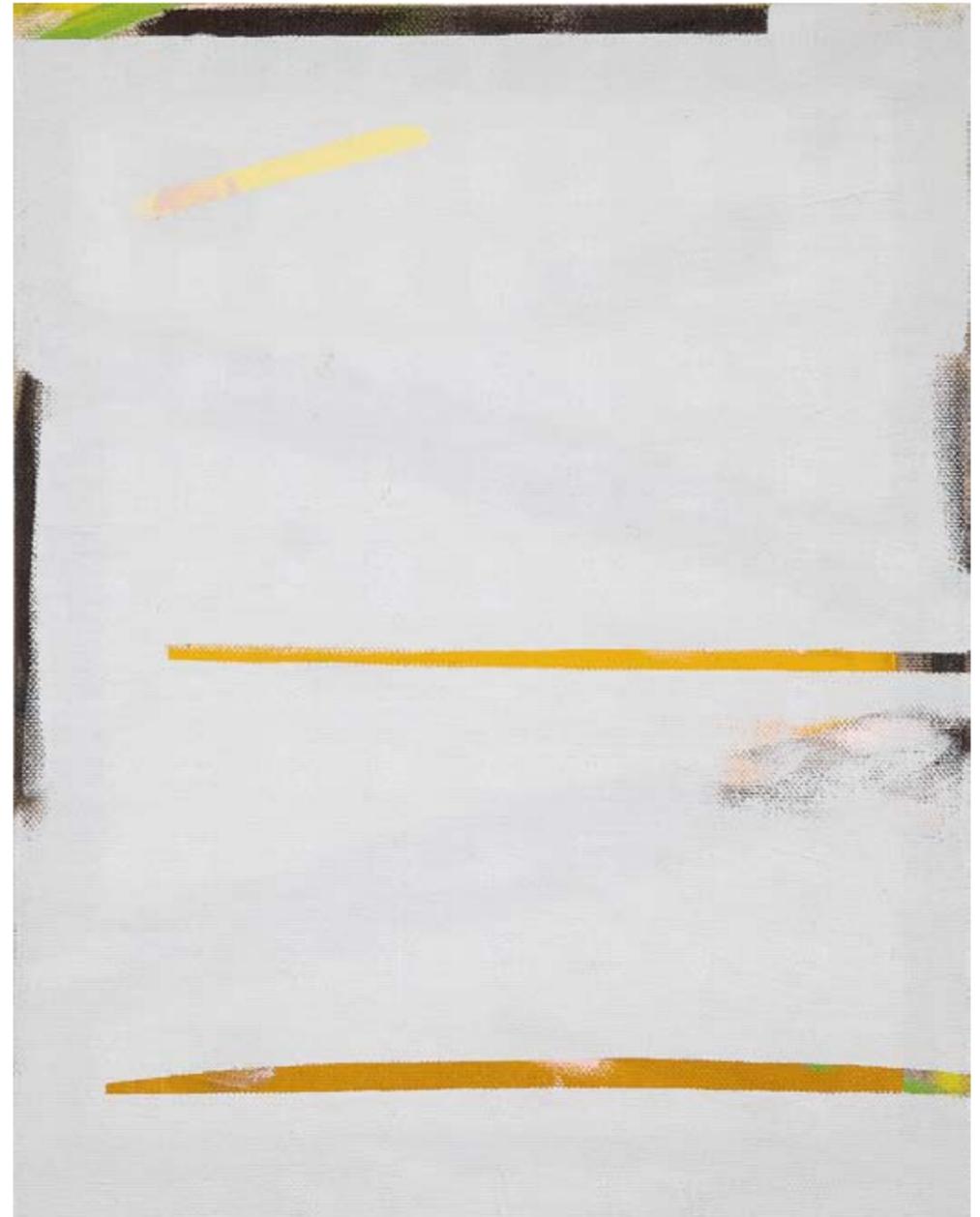
*Cheddar*, 2014  
oil on linen  
21 x 18 in. (53.34 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM56



*Delay*, 2014  
oil on linen  
23 x 18 in. (58.42 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM57



*Adjourn*, 2014  
oil on linen  
23 x 18 in. (58.42 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM58



*Lag*, 2014  
oil on linen  
23 x 18 in. (58.42 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM59



*Contact II*, 2014  
oil on linen  
25 x 21 in. (63.5 x 53.34 cm)  
cat. no. JAM60



*Trajectory II*, 2014  
oil on linen  
22 x 18 in. (55.88 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM61



*untitled (Salvage)*, 2014  
oil on linen  
22 x 18 in. (55.88 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM62



*Salvage III*, 2014  
oil on linen  
22 x 18 in. (55.88 x 45.72 cm)  
cat. no. JAM63





#### EDUCATION

MFA, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, 2003

BFA, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, 2000

#### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *selected paintings* (solo), George Lawson Gallery, San Francisco
- 2014 *nothing is plural* (solo), George Lawson Gallery, San Francisco
- 2013 *5 New Artists: On the Map*, California Heritage Museum, Santa Monica, CA
- 2012 *new paintings* (solo), George Lawson Gallery, Los Angeles  
*Paper*, George Lawson Gallery, Los Angeles  
*Seven Young Los Angeles Painters I Like*, George Lawson Gallery  
*Untitled*, (with Ethan Ayer), Light & Wire Gallery, Los Angeles
- 2011 *Young Collector Show*, Ochi Gallery, Sun Valley, ID
- 2010 *NEW!*, Another Year in LA, Los Angeles  
Workshop: With Trinie Dalton, Las Cienagas Projects
- 2009 *Intellectual Abstraction*, Another Year in LA, Los Angeles
- 2008 *Ethan Ayer - Jacob Melchi - Brian Sharp*, MASON, Los Angeles  
E-flux Video Rental, Centro de Arte Moderna José de Azeredo Perdigão - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon  
*Material Launch Exhibition*, Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles  
LA, a select survey of contemporary art, Center For Contemporary Art, Sacramento
- 2007 Reading at MOCA PDC for the *Nothing Moments* Book Release
- 2006 *The Verdant Trance Lay Far and Wide* (solo), Another Year In LA, Los Angeles  
*Draw and Line and Follow It*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions  
*I See Fluxus Wherever I Go*, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions  
*Telling*, Torrance Art Museum, curated by Kristina Newhouse  
*Delusionarium 3*, Cal State Fullerton, Grand Central Arts Center, curated by Jesse Benson
- 2005 *Imaginary Is Potential*, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art, Helsinki  
*Everything In Particular*, ACME gallery, Los Angeles, curated by Kevin Hanley and Michael Krebber  
*Having Differences*, I-20 gallery, New York, NY, curated by Kevin Hanley, Steve Hanson, Paul Judelson  
*Constructed Worlds*, fa projects gallery, London  
*Idiolects*, Angels Gate Cultural Center, curated by Annetta Kapon and Roy Dowell, San Pedro, CA
- 2004 *De Een Minuten (the one minutes)*, Sandberg Instituut & Nederlands Instituut voor mediakunst Montevideo, also airs on Dutch television  
*Fly By Night*, Mandarin Gallery, Los Angeles  
*Delusionarium 1*, curated by Jesse Benson, Santa Ana, CA  
*Terpicooniteen (Please give until gone)*, 16:1 gallery, Santa Monica

#### AWARDS

Lari Pittman Award, Otis College of Art and Design, 2003

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, Kenneth, San Francisco Chronicle, art review, January 2014

Ollman, Leah, Los Angeles Times, art review, March 2012

Benson, Jesse, *Delusionarium* catalog, 2006

Nys-Dembroot, Shana, *The Verdant Trance Lay Far and Wide*, Flavorpill website, 2006

Johnson, *Having Differences*, The New York Times Critics Picks, 2005

Holland, Charles, *Constructed Worlds*, Modern Painters Magazine, 2005

