

SEARS·PEYTON·GALLERY

NEW YORK·LOS ANGELES

Betty Merken

CV

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 Russo Lee Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2017 Russo Lee Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2016 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2014 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2013 Argazzi Art, Lakeville, CT
 - Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
 - Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2011 Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
- 2010 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
 - Melissa Morgan Fine Arts, Palm Desert, CA
 - Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2009 Seattle Art Museum Gallery, Seattle, WA
 - Argazzi Art, Lakeville, CT
- 2006 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
 - Washington State Convention Center, Seattle, WA
- 2005 Anne Reed Gallery, Ketchum, ID
 - Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2004 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
 - Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2003 Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
- 2002 Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2001 Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2000 Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
 - Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
- 1999 American Institute of Architects Gallery, Seattle, WA
 - Takada Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1998 Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
- 1997 Seattle Pacific University Gallery, Seattle, WA
 - Takada Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1996 Grover Thurston Gallery, Seattle, WA
 - Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

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SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO
- 2019 Sears-Peyton Gallery, NY
- 2018 Steward Gallery, Boise, ID
Sears-Peyton Gallery, NY
- 2017 Pinea-Linea de Costa A.I.R International Residency Exhibition, Rota, Spain
- 2017 Russo Lee Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2017 Alan Avery Gallery, Atlanta, GA
- 2017 Stewart Gallery, Boise ID
- 2017 Nancy Toomey Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2017 Heather Gaudio Fine Art, New Canaan, CT
- 2017 "Art on Paper Fair," NYC.
- 2016 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR (invitational)
Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
"Line" Stewart Gallery, Boise, ID
- 2015 Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR. Recent Acquisitions of Prints and Drawings Spanning 500 Years (2015). Curator: Dr. Mary Weaver Chapin, Curator of Prints and Drawings, Portland Art Museum.
Heather Gaudio Fine Art, New Canaan, CT
- 2014 Gilman Contemporary, Ketchum, ID
- 2013 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
Argazzi Art, Lakeville, CT,
Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
- 2012 Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2011 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
25th Anniversary Gallery Group Show, Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
Film and Paper, Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
All Abstract: Six Gallery Artists, Gebert Contemporary, Scottsdale, AZ
Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2010 New Prints 2010/Spring, International Print Center, New York, NY
Paper, Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2009 Argazzi Art, Lakeville, CT
Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
Hospitality House 25th Invitational Art Auction, Andrea Schwartz Gallery, SF, CA

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- San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art Invitational Art Auction, San Jose, CA
Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2008 Invitational Exhibition, Seattle Art Museum Gallery, Seattle, WA
Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
- 2007 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
Red Dot Art Fair, Miami, FL
Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2006 20th Anniversary Group Show, The Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
Works on Paper, Shenzhen Institute of Contemporary Art, Shenzhen, China (catalogue)
Miami International Art Fair, Miami, FL
- 2005 Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, TX
Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
Belloc Lowndes Gallery, Chicago, IL
Art LA, Dolby Chadwick Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
Henry Gallery Invitational, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA
San Francisco International Art Exposition, Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco
San Francisco Art Institute Invitational Auction, San Francisco, CA
International Print Center New York
- 2004 J. Johnson Gallery, Jacksonville, FL
Los Angeles International Art Exposition, Los Angeles, CA
San Francisco International Art Exposition, Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Innovative Printmaking, Seattle Art Museum Gallery, Seattle, WA
Seattle Art Museum Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 2003 Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR
Goya-Girl Contemporary Art Gallery, Baltimore, MD (review)
San Francisco International Art Exposition, Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Los Angeles Printmaking Society 17th National Exhibition, The Armory Center for the Arts,
Pasadena, CA (catalogue)
Headlands Center for the Arts, Marin Headlands, CA
- 2002 Masters of the Print, 416 West Gallery, Denison, TX (International print exhibition, juried by
Leonard Lehrer; award)
The Art of Monotype, Seattle Art Museum Gallery, Seattle, WA
San Francisco International Art Exposition, Dolby Chadwick Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Affordable Art Fair, Pier 51, New York, Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, NY
Faculty Exhibition, Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA
Art for AIDS, Butterfield & Butterfield, San Francisco, CA (invitational auction)

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- 2001 Works on Paper, Park Avenue Armory, New York, Sears Peyton Gallery, NY
Invitational Art Auction, Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Patina and Surfaces, Anne Reed Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Seattle Art Museum Talent, Staff Exhibition, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA
- 1999 Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
Art for AIDS, Seattle Art Museum Art Pavilion, Seattle, WA (invitational)
- 1996 Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA (invitational)
Takada Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1995 Folie á Deux, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA (invitational drawing exhibition)
Takada Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1994 Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, CA
Bear Stearns & Co., Inc., New York, NY
Bellevue Towers, Bellevue, WA
Boeing Company, Chicago, IL
Callan Associates, San Francisco, CA
Cardwell Architects, Seattle, WA
Charles Schwab, Menlo Park, CA
Charles Schwab, New York, NY
Charles Schwab, San Francisco, CA
Hilton Corporation, Chicago, IL
Christie Law Group, Seattle, WA
Civita Institute, Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy
Columbia Pacific, Santa Monica, CA
Stephen Day Architecture, Seattle, WA
Fidelity Investments
Genentech, Inc., San Francisco, CA
General Electric, Brussels, Belgium
The Gordon Gilkey Center for Graphic Arts, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR
Grunwald Center for Graphic Arts, UCLA Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA
Hallmark Cards, Inc, Kansas City, MO
Henry Ford III Collection, Detroit, MI
Industry Club, Tokyo, Japan
Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA

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Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland, OR
Pacific Venture Consultants, Los Angeles, CA and Tokyo, Japan
Paramount Studios, Los Angeles, CA
Price Waterhouse Cooper, LLP, Portland, OR
Sebastian and Sons, Napa Valley, CA
Spear Street Capitol, San Francisco, CA
Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, OR
UCLA Medical Center, Neuroscience Center, Westwood, CA
United States Embassy, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

2017 Pinea-Linea de Costa A.I.R International Residency Fellowship, Cadiz, Spain
2012 BAU Institute Painting Fellowship, Otranto, Italy
2011 Astra Zarina Fellowship, The Civita Institute, Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy
2010 BAU Institute Painting Fellowship, Otranto, Italy
2004 Etching Residency, Crown Point Press, San Francisco, CA
Milnora Roberts Fine Art Awards, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
2002 Award. Masters of the Print, 416 West Gallery, Dennison, TX (exhibited with Robert Rauschenberg, Matisse, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Jim Dine, Sol Lewitt. and Curator: Leonard Lehrer, Master Printmaker, Founding Member, International Print Center New York)

LECTURES AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

2013 Guest Lecturer, University of Oregon, Eugene and Portland, OR
1985–2013 Guest Lecturer, University of Washington School of Art, Seattle, WA
1990–96, 1998–99, 2010 Guest Lecturer, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA
2004–06, 2008 Guest Lecturer, Callison Architecture, Seattle, WA
1998–99, 2000, 2005 Guest Lecturer and Instructor, Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA
1990–98, 2000–2005 Guest Lecturer, American Institute of Architects, Seattle, WA
2005 Instructor, Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle, WA
1990 Instructor, Seattle Art Museum Art Studio Program, Seattle, WA
1982–89 Instructor, The Otis Art Institute, LA, CA
1981–2015 Instructor and Guest Lecturer, UCLA, Department of the Arts, LA, CA

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EDUCATION

Crown Point Press, San Francisco, CA; residency workshop in printmaking

University of Washington, Seattle, WA; B.A. Arts Education

University of California at Los Angeles; graduate work in art

Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME

Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC

PUBLICATIONS AND REVIEWS

- 2014 Betty Merken. *Paintings and Monotypes: A Mid Career Selection*. With essays by Leonard Lehrer and Lilly Wei. Seattle: Marquand Books.
- 2014 Richard Speer. "Betty Merken: Gravity and Whispers" *Art LTD* Sept/Oct 2014 May-June, 2014, 11.
- 2013 Leon Graham, "The Art Scene," *Lakeville Journal*, Lakeville, CT June 6, 2013. *ArtLtd*, January-February, 2013, 16.
- 2011 *Luxe Interiors and Design*, winter, 2011, 65.
- 2010 Anne Adams, "First Thursday Picks," *Portland Monthly*, June 30, 2010.
- 2009 Review, Solo Exhibition, Argazzi Art, *Lakeville Journal*, (Lakeville, CT), Sept 3, Review, Solo Exhibition, Argazzi Art, *Lakeville Journal*, (Lakeville, CT), February 2009
- 2007 "A Common Language". Shenzhen University College of Art and Design, Shenzhen Fine Art Institute, Shenzhen, China, August 2007 (catalogue).
- 2006 Debra Koppman. "Mary Josephson and Betty Merken," *Artweek*, March 2006, 6.
- 2005 Jennifer Massoni. "Glowing Reviews," *California Home and Design*, Jan. 2005, 89.
Chloe Harris, "Home is Where the Art Is," *Design* (San Francisco), Nov 2005, 112-123.
"Collecting Art", *7 — 7 Magazine*, San Francisco, November 2005, 122.
- 2004 Robert Flynn Johnson. "Twelve on Twelve, A Monotype Portfolio," Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, February 2004.
- 2003 Gabriella Fanning, *The Art Collector's Resource Catalogue*, vol. 2, 2003, 51.
Art on Paper, September-October 2003, 65.
Mike Giuliano. "Paper Cuts: Goya-Girl's National Show Chases Down the Sharpest Works on Paper," *City Paper*, Baltimore, January 29, 2003.
Kevin Salatino. "Juror's Statement," Los Angeles Printmaking Society 17th National Exhibition Catalogue, The Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA, 2003.
- 2000 Ron Glown. "Betty Merken at AIA," *Artweek*, January 2000.
- 1996 Frances Anderton. "The Gallery Strikes Back," *The Art Newspaper*, London, No. 61 July-August, 1996
- 1987 Betty and Stefan Merken. *Wall Art*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1987, 128.

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Betty Merken

Artist Statement

"My work interfaces along a continuum of color and materiality. Inspired by observations of the manner in which light affects color with its passing movement and changes I am fascinated by the power of color to evoke emotion and to encourage contemplation, allowing the viewer to become the subject of the work.

"In my daily studio practice I attempt to strike a balance between painterly guts and the pared down elegance of formalism. The inherent tension between these two elements is filled with mystery and metaphor, challenging me to create works which have a sense of inevitability about them and which reveal a sense of oneness with the viewer."

– Betty Merken

Betty Merken has had 31 solo exhibitions and 50 group exhibitions in the United States and abroad and her work is held in numerous private and public collections in the United States, Europe and Asia. Her paintings and works on paper have been exhibited nationally and internationally and are represented in the collections of the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Eugene, OR, the Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA, and the Civita Institute in Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy. She has been honored as a recipient of fellowships and awards from the BAU Institute, Otranto, Italy, the Civita Institute, Civita di Bagnoregio, Italy, and the Pinea–Linea Foundation, Rota, Spain.

In contrast to the majority of contemporary printmakers who employ traditional printmaking methods such as etching and lithography to create multiples of an image, each of Betty Merken's prints is one of a kind— a unique print, a monotype, one of the most challenging, innovative, and painterly of the high profile print techniques.

Betty Merken's work addresses focused investigations of color and light, structure and proportion, process and materials. Curators and critics often characterize her prints as having the authority of paintings and have placed her work within the context of the work of Josef Albers, Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Donald Judd, and James Turrell, defining her position within the context of modern and contemporary art.



Betty Merken: Monotypes

By Leonard Lehrer

The monotype is one of the several high profile print techniques. While it is likely the least of the methodologies utilized by the majority of professional printmakers, it is also among the most challenging and rewarding. As the intaglio, relief print, screen print and lithography churn out a variety of different images, the monotype is all too often seen as a distant cousin. To explore its qualities, its demands, and its special traits requires a type of commitment and passion of a singular nature, e.g., in the other print mediums the artist can make various adjustments and gradually reach the desired effect; with the monotype there is one run through the press. Period. A second run changes everything.



A particularly secretive and private process, the monotype requires a focus and concentration that are virtually absolute. While all print mediums tend to be held fairly close to the chest, the monotype experience seems to require a greater element of risk coupled with a strain of privacy almost monastic in its seclusion. Notwithstanding the tactile pleasure of the so-called major print methodologies, the monotype embraces a sensibility that takes this process to another level of chance – an immersion in the visceral challenge of immediacy.

Betty Merken is one of the very rare contemporary printmakers who has embraced the monotype with the focus and passion of her fullest artistic sensibilities. What she has achieved is significant in that few others have added so much to a specific technique (e.g., the relief print: Antonio Frasconi; wood engraving: Fritz Eichenberg; lithography: June Wayne; et.al.). She follows in the footsteps of Benedetto Castiglione, Blake, Degas and Jules Heller's discoveries in monotype printing. She has exploited the tactile nature of monotype printing to make method and content appear as a single enterprise. Simply put, seeing Merken's monotypes does not permit second guessing to the rhetorical questions – is there a proof in another color scheme, on different paper, etc.? What is there is the whole thing – as in a painting, for example. It is an "edition" of one. And that impression is totally different than number 6 in an edition of 50. The monotype is accountable to a different set of visual cues.

In an era that reflects what Gertrude Stein once called "...the art of knowing exactly how far to go in going too far" and the view of art as noted by Andy Warhol "... art is what you can get away with," it is gratifying to confront a very serious and very gifted artist of the fine art print providing such resonance, depth and affirmation of her vision. Betty Merken comes from a long standing tradition that embraced the rich underpinnings of mathematics to achieve a "lingua franca" – the wonders of the "Golden Section", the "Divine Proportion", perspective, geometry, the pentagon and the visual harmony of the Renaissance. These basic components of our visual history also produced the remarkable qualities implicit to the *de Menil Rothko Chapel* in Houston. In fact, Merken's monotypes often appear to have been created in the shadow of that chapel. Suspended blocks of color floating in a not clearly delineated space, the diptych format with the slender white negative space separating two caverns of color all contribute to a superstructure of an architectural nature. As Merken herself wrote in 2004, "... I created a different spatial relationship to the working surface – more from the ground up, more architectural ... processes that were once strange and unfamiliar have now become reassuringly familiar and are interwoven into a tapestry of geometry." And then, quite unexpectedly, and very alive and potent, one finds a variation on one of Motherwell's *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, an image that fits comfortably in Merken's stunning portfolio *Twelve on Twelve – a Monotype Portfolio* (2004).

Of great importance in Betty Merken's monotypes is her remarkably effectively use of color. In simplest terms I would have to say she is an explorer, an explorer of color and hue and tone. Her decisions are intense, fresh, unexpected and demanding. Her selection of colors invites discourse, contemplation and surprise. Her surface quality is a remarkable part of these images. One has to see these close up to appreciate the full impact of what this artist does with the richness of her surfaces: many of the "slabs" of color have several layers of density applied and when the pressure of going through the press takes place one sees the rectangle of the solid color, then one also notes the wonderful surface texture resulting from the pressure of the transfer of a color to the paper – a sea of minute pulls, a sea of texture, visual evidence of a process born. Part of this is due to Merken's view of her monotypes as direct extensions of her paintings; a significant

component of these images clearly embraces the transformation of her paintings into the monotype methodology. This subtle mixture is literally a new way of seeing and understanding this artist's blending of two worlds and absorbing the best of both as a result – presenting a banquet –a feast from an unending cornucopia. “The brush dances over some sections of the image and elsewhere drags its heavy loaded paint mixes into the nooks and crannies of the carapace. Luminosity and light resisting sculptural solidity tease the eye. It is iridescent with refracted and reflected light. A compound of gorgeous hues and intricately detailed but never costive draftsmanship, prompting the spectator to slip and slide over certain parts, to linger upon others, and to chase down detail that comes close to vanishing on the closest inspection, this is genuine visual wit.”¹

In my view Betty Merken belongs to a cluster of American artists loosely defined as the “hard edge” abstract artists or the minimalists. Her intuitive sensibility is a first cousin to the likes of Newman, Frank Stella, Ad Reinhardt, Fred Sandback, et. al.; all their images are both on the paper as well as in the paper. At the same time Merken is accommodating another force in her work, the remarkable series *Homage to the Square* part of Josef Albers' 1963 *Interaction of Color*. She appears to be from the same genetic pool as Albers, i.e., theme and variation, endlessly as in a Bach fugue or the studies presented in Charles Bouleaux's book *The Painter's Secret Geometry* (1980). Further, given her passion for the slab-like images may even suggest that part of that pool is a direct connection with Mary McCarthy's *The Stones of Florence* (1956). It's easy to relate several prints in the *Monotype Portfolio* to these close relatives. In addition to the reference to mathematics, the Renaissance and Rothko, I have come to see the connections in her exploratory attitudes to other facets of the arts such as the formal qualities of Erik Satie's exquisite *Gymnopodies* and the contemplative nature of Zen-like qualities. In short, there is a depth in what I see that continually reveals one layer after another. We have just begun to see the complexities of Merken's work, the resonance of belief and method, the deeply satisfying experience revealed again and again by her multi-faceted artistry.

Leonard Lehrer

Emeritus Professor of Art, New York University

Founding Trustee, International Print Center New York

¹ Conal Shields, “John Ruskin – Artist and Observer” National Gallery of Canada -- 2014



Light, Through Fields of Color

By Lilly Wei

In 2004, Betty Merken made a painting called *Summer Fruit* that was crucial to her development as an artist. Halved into two canvases, one was brushed a succulent coral, like the flesh of a ripe melon while the other, green-gold, ribbed, netted, conjured its outer skin. The viewer could easily regard it, with or without its title, as a melon pared to its visual essence, more melon-like, arguably, than a realistic depiction. On the other hand, it could also be seen as non-objective. But, more completely, more alluringly, it could be considered both. It was the first such painting she had made, in which the focus was on the fluidity of exchange between the referential and non-referential.

In her latest body of paintings, made over the past two years, Merken continues to be deeply engrossed by abstraction's evocative range as it swings between the more representative and the less so, by the instability of perception. Her paintings are often generously scaled but not overwhelming, updated minimalist abstraction or color field painting (currently enjoying a resurgence, as is abstract painting in general). They are related to earlier modernist works such as Matisse's celebrated 1914 *View of Notre Dame*, Rothko's luminous rectangles, Morris Louis' stain paintings, as well as his veils and stripes, and Richard Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series in their avid interest in color, light, architecture and process. They also consider Roman murals of architectural vistas, medieval palimpsests, Renaissance frescoes, and much more, an homage to the past filtered through a contemporary lens. Merken's inclusive aesthetics split between Western pictorial traditions and that of the Far East, the influence of Chinese literati and Japanese Zen paintings discernible in her work, as well as an affinity for decorative screens and design, for fabrics and textiles.

While Merken's canvases are spare in terms of delineated imagery, they are rich in paint and color, created out of layerings of translucent and opaque hues, steadied by an elegant, fastidiously placed architectonic presence. Indeed, the tautness in her compositions is due to her embrace of antithesis and synthesis, instinctively balancing opposites to achieve a more resonant whole. Even more process-oriented than before, the drips, spills, stains and the effects of gravity are the prevailing imagery of these new paintings. It's a collaboration between the artist and her medium in which she both relinquishes control and reclaims it.

Her palette is keyed to specific geographical locations, sensitive to their tonalities and atmosphere, to their art and architecture. Italy has long been a resource for Merken, who spends much time there, captivated—as who is not?—by the lucidity of its colors and its matchless light. The humanistic proportions of its architecture, underscored by the alternation between solids and voids in Italian urban spaces, have also found their way into her consciousness and her work. Merken, as part of her process, looks for “accidental paintings” on the walls and facades of the storied towns and cities she has explored in her sojourns: Cortona, Orvieto, Otranto, Rome, Vitorchiano, others. Sketched by time, weather, and human intervention, it is the equivalence of these traces that, introduced into her compositions, lend them poignancy.

Merken is also an authority on color who frequently advises architects and designers on its use. Researching color is second nature to her, recording what she sees by means of digital photography and gouache swatches that she makes on site, replicating the color as precisely as possible. They are part of an archive that numbers nearly a thousand swatches to date. Referring to them when in the studio, these distillates of color, like a snapshot, reproduce a portrait of a place. Merken, as she has done since at least *Summer Fruit*, seeks the requisite, the immediate, the sensuous. She uses color as a musician might compose with notes or a perfumer with scent, eliciting subjective responses, none of which is entirely fixed, the most thrilling attribute of abstraction. Always alert to color wherever she is, in Rome she found a gold and red ochre; in Otranto, a milky white and an ultramarine and turquoise; in Civita di Bagnoregio, yellow ochres and a manganese violet; in Cortona, a green; in Spello, a range of lovely pinks and mauves. These colors, once recorded, become part of a lexicon and will appear elsewhere; they are also not fixed.

Likewise, although these paintings might be inspired by a specific locale, they are not illustrations of that locale. *Gravity* (2014) consists of a block of pale cool grey on the right that takes up almost half the painting. Next to it is a thinner strip that is nearly black, followed by a somewhat wider one that is lightened to a medium grey. The last strip is a grey that echoes the first. The light and dark act as a positive–negative juxtaposition of solid and space that can also read as purely two-dimensional, another instance of Merken’s oppositions, establishing a complex visual rhythm that toggles between advancement, retreat, and flatness. Narrow, overlapping rivulets of paint cascading downward merge to form these blocks, causing their surfaces to ripple. Emerging slowly from the field is a linear structure that seems a section of an isometric drawing that also projects forward, flattens, then dissolves into the ground, the painting inspired by the ancient hill town of Vitorchiano, Merken said, with its stone cave dwellings that hug the hillside.

In the Pink (2014), refers to the pink and mauve stone masonry of ancient Spello. It is also composed of streams of paint coursing downward, the canvas this time divided more or less horizontally, the upper register covered in a striated warm rose–brown that thins out in the lower register, revealing the array of colors beneath. Superimposed over it across the surface is a schematic architectural rendering in another shade of rose, cradling the entire painting, adding a

structural component to the flux of the paint as if it were a metaphoric vessel filled with time, like the stones that built the city, like the painting itself, the flow of color emblematic of the transient.

Otranto (2014) is similarly constructed, its stripes overlaid by a trio of parallel lines on the right that begins straight, then angles sharply as it descends before straightening out again on its way to the bottom edge. It is another striking juxtaposition of line and color, of the architectonic and the ephemeral, its lilting blues and greens recalling both the clear expanse of the Adriatic Sea that borders the Greco-Roman city and the blue and green shutters that edge most of the windows of its sunstruck limestone buildings.

Merken's blues are especially ravishing. In *Notte* (2014), it is a blue that Merken associates with the shadowed walls of Rome, seen at night. The painting is a diaphanous, delicately brushed, monochromatic curtain of modulated color and elusive shapes, its drips flowing in several directions, subsumed by the overall hue. A few trickles of slightly darker blue streak down the entire painting to form several undulating, continuous lines, just off center. They trickle to the bottom gracefully and suggest an outline of a slender column; they also suggest less polite dribbles, although gentrified, establishing yet one more contrast. *Lapis* (2014) is inspired by the lapis lazuli mosaics on the façade of Orvieto's Duomo. Burnished to incandescence, it is the deep, enchanted blue of the sky just before night finally falls. As always, these paintings are the uncanny translations of Merken's keen attentiveness to color, light and ambience and as always, they are deeply satisfying.