

FreshPaintMagazine

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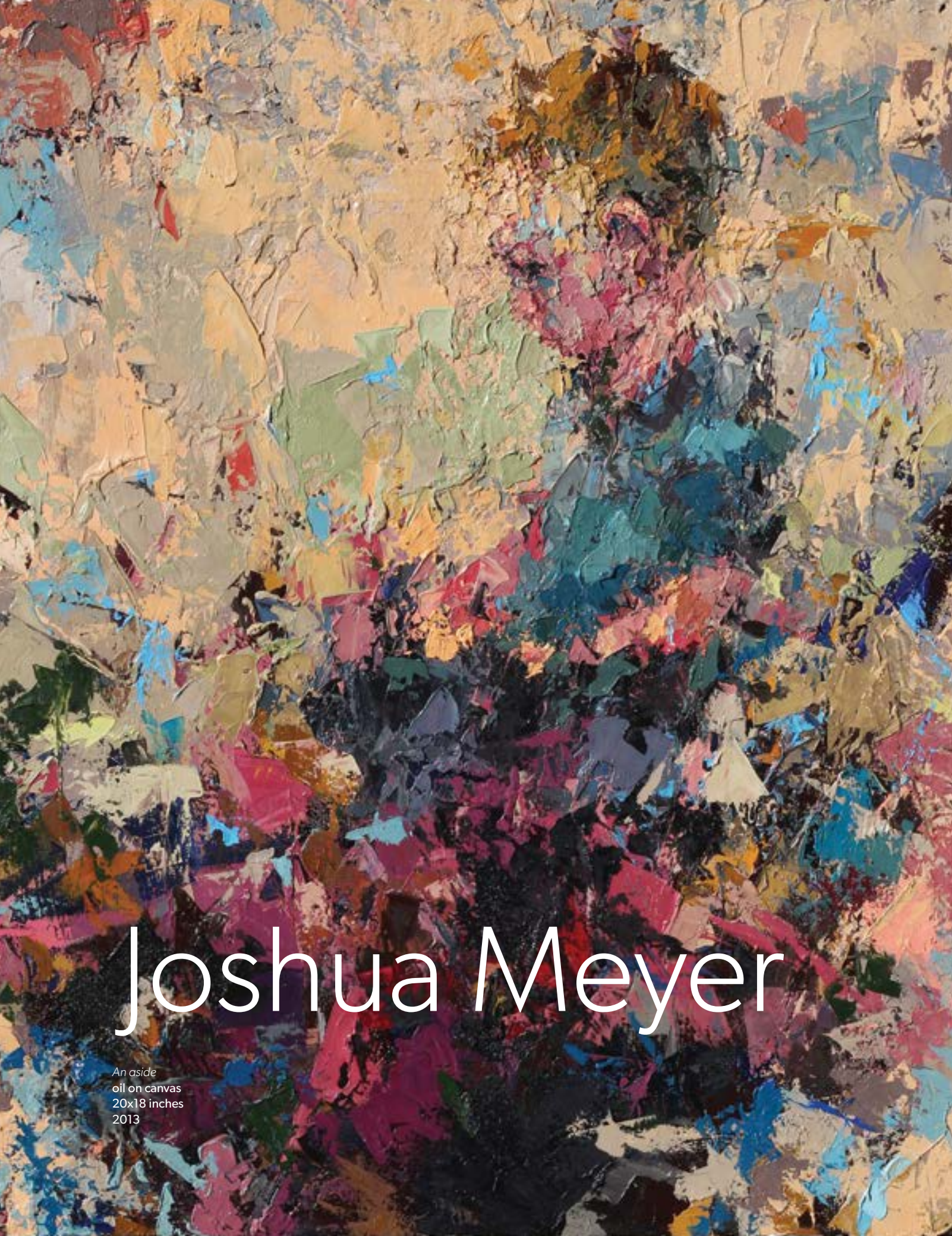
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Alice Herrick

ON THE COVER

Tom Climent

Harborage
oil on board, 12 x 12 inches



Joshua Meyer

An aside
oil on canvas
20x18 inches
2013

“Looking at a Meyer painting means changing your mind about what you see,” writes the novelist Allegra Goodman, “As living people do, Meyer’s subjects will reveal themselves, and they will disappear. Look at them up close and they scatter, self-effacing. Back away and they gather force and gravity. Back away a little more. Give Meyer’s figures space, and they’ll possess the room.”

The Cambridge, Massachusetts artist is known for his thickly layered paintings of people, and for a searching, open-ended process. Meyer is the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant as well as the Sustainable Arts Foundation Award, and a 2010 Painting Fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. He studied art at Yale University and The Bezalel Academy. The artist’s work has been shown in galleries and museums across the United States, Europe and Asia, including a solo exhibition, Tohu vaVohu at Hebrew College in Boston, and Becoming at the Yale Slifka Center and NYU Bronfman Center. Meyer is represented by Rice Polak Gallery in Provincetown and Dolby Chadwick Gallery in San Francisco. He will have a retrospective exhibit at UCLA’s Dortort Center for Creativity in the Arts in the Fall of 2016.

www.joshua-meyer.com

FP: What inspired your latest paintings?

JM: Painting is such a physical activity — the inspiration comes when I find the beat or the rhythm. Once the picture and the paint get chaotic then they can absorb and take in everything that is on my mind, both conscious and subconscious. Strangely enough, the more packed my canvases become, the more they are able to hold. Then as I go forward I have to sort it all out. I am searching for a foothold and a coherence.

Life is full of contradictions, complications and uncertainties, so I don’t trust a work of art that is too sure of itself.

As I paint, I try to find my way by plunging deeply and directly into the paintings. I revel in the paint and the chaos and I tend to get lost. At the outset, the clean canvas and static image are hurdles, so I start exploring.

My paintings shouldn’t feel like fixed things. I am after some kind of motion or dissonance. They are hard to pin down, and I am at my best when the pictures are unstable — where there is still room for the viewer to insert themselves between the marks and muck about for themselves. I want a picture that makes you a little uncomfortable and unsettled. Unresolved in a way that makes it hard for you to take your leave of it.

“Life is full of contradictions, complications and uncertainties, so I don’t trust a work of art that is too sure of itself.”

- Joshua Meyer

FP: We are really inspired by the movement and texture in your work. How long does each piece take to complete?

JM: Since I paint people that I know well, and I paint them over long spans of time, the paintings become accumulations of time. I invite them into the studio week after week, for months on end, in order to make a single painting. Most pictures take months, some take years.

Over time the layers and paint build until the painting is able to tell the story of its own creation. The ideas of one day overlap those of another. But then sometimes the colors from a previous iteration sneak out as a reminder of where we came from.

FP: Describe your process. Do you work from life, references or a combination of both?

JM: I paint from life because it forces me to be responsive. There is an urgency when someone I know is in the studio with me.

I often continue to paint after the model has left for the day, but then they return to the studio the following week so I have to revisit all of my decisions.

Sometimes as I paint we talk or debate, other times we listen to music. We can use the time to relax or to unpack our lives. Sometimes the studio is silent. But each painting is built in layers as days or months pass between us in the studio. The paintings are the accrual of these visits. We are collecting all this information in order to open up a story. I love to discover how people reveal themselves and disappear.

FP: How do you balance your studio time and personal life. What are some of the biggest challenges of being an artist?

JM: Even if I think I am painting something simple and straightforward, painting has a way of mirroring back all of the noise and chaos that my personal life can provide. Art is an all-consuming beast. None of my models are strangers, they are all people who are close to me, so part of that mirroring can be very direct. I paint my wife, I paint my children, I paint my friends and I also paint myself, so inevitably my studio life and personal life are more interwoven than balanced.

FP: What are your thoughts on the traditional painting medium in our day and age? What is the future of the medium in your opinion?

JM: I have two opposing impulses, either to try to stand on the shoulders of giants, or else to try to tear it all down so I can forge ahead on my own. The tension between these two is where my voice emerges.



Joshua Meyer
Lilacism
oil on board
16x20 inches
2015



Joshua Meyer
Detail of *Ginger*
oil on canvas
16x16 inches
2015

“I’m an oil painter because the tradition of painting holds such a rich language. It is an artist’s task to push, pull and recreate that ever-evolving vocabulary.”

- Joshua Meyer

When I use a huge swash of impasto, I want you to think about the layers I am building, but I also want you to think back to how Rembrandt reserved his thickest paints for particular moments of magic. If they make you feel a touch of the visceral motion of a De Kooning or Turner because I use bits of their language, or the searching desperation of a Giacometti line then you have a shortcut into the world I am building.

But on the other hand, the paintings I’m making couldn’t possibly have been made in any era other than our own. Rembrandt opened the door for me, but Seventeenth Century Amsterdam would have found my paintings inscrutably noisy. These are paintings solidly embedded in my own world.

Artists always venture into new modes and media when they offer convincing and captivating languages or opportunities. But the most compelling art, to my eyes, feeds off both the past and the present so that the language and the message it is trying to convey are inseparable. We build on the accumulated knowledge so that we can explore and reflect our own time and place.

I’m an oil painter because the tradition of painting holds such a rich language. It is an artist’s task to push, pull and recreate that ever-evolving vocabulary.

FP: How do you decide if a work is successful or complete?

JM: Actually, I like a painting that feels incomplete. Fragmentary. A little bit undone.

One of the funny things about paintings, as opposed to most other art forms, is that they don’t have ends or beginnings. So when I get lost, I know I’m on the right track.

I want things to remain open, ambiguous and contradictory. I think the best paintings leave things out or break off. These gaps are the way in for the viewer, and also the reason to stay. We need the space between the marks and what they mean to represent.



Joshua Meyer
Fits and starts
oil on canvas
20x16 inches
2014