

SEANKELLY

Bacon, Alex. "LANDON METZ: Michael Jackson Penthouse," *The Brooklyn Rail*, May 6, 2015.

BROOKLYN RAIL

LANDON METZ

Michael Jackson Penthouse

In the form of a small Hudson Valley home at 438 Carroll Street, Retrospective Gallery recently presented Landon Metz with the opportunity to explore the potential for his paintings to intervene in, and in doing so to rearticulate, a particular space. His intervention, while intimately involved with the architectural terms of that space, facilitates rather than dictates the viewer's movement through it. Movement takes on an almost musical syncopation as the viewer allows the lyrical progression of Metz's biomorphic forms to direct his or her eyes and finds that this visual rhythm in turn affects the way that he or she experiences his or her body traversing 438 Carroll Street. The result is the most significant expression of Metz's practice to date.

For the past few years Metz has been refining his technique of staining canvas. In the works at Retrospective we see that Metz's ability to focus his process and materials has produced a sequence of paintings that play off of the serial repetition of a limited number of pseudo-organic forms that advance lyrically across the picture plane.* In each room, and in several crevices of the small house that Metz has taken over, a given form unfolds across clusters of canvases. From afar or at a casual glance, it is possible to think that Metz used a stencil, but close and prolonged examination makes it clear that Metz executed each form separately and unaided, as there are subtle variations from one to the next.



Michael Jackson Penthouse, Installation view, Retrospective, Hudson, New York, 2014

This is especially clear when one sees that each painting has its own color scheme—a dark blue or green. While canvas panels abut, Metz has made no attempt to create an effect of complete seamlessness as the eye moves from one to the next. Not only is there a slight break between forms begun on one canvas and completed on the next, but the palette is often subtly different. While Metz retains the same general tone throughout, he often sets a canvas of blue forms next to one of green ones, etc. This means that, while one form may start out green, for example, it finishes in another color, blue.

Metz's painterly installation is even more symphonic than architectural in nature. His canvases interact with the space of the room, but they do so in a quiet yet poetic way. The paintings reach out to the viewer and the space in which they are displayed by extending the sense of rhythm that he establishes in the movement of forms across several panels.

Metz's attention to visual rhythm is most evident in the sequence of small works that are vertically stacked above the staircase. As one descends from the top floor, one follows the progression of a floating vertical form, vaguely mountainous with its stepped left side, across four stacked canvases. The viewer feels as if he or she has activated a film reel, watching the same form flicker through hunter green and navy variations of itself. This experience is concluded by the fifth canvas, which one first encounters as a solitary work hanging next to the front door, but which joins up with the four second-floor works when one is halfway down the stairs, extending and completing the formal unfolding, and physically and conceptually linking the show's two floors.



Michael Jackson Penthouse, Installation view, Retrospective, Hudson, New York, 2014

Each room is carefully calibrated by Metz based on its dimensions, again with the end goal of establishing a visual tone-poem that playfully engages the architecture, rather than attempting to subvert or compete with it. Some paintings, such as the one hung under the stairs and the one affixed to the front of the house verge on the whimsical, as is also sometimes the habit of Chris Martin, and this logic can also be seen in the way smaller, more compositionally sparse and open works are installed in the diminutive upstairs rooms and hallway. These surround the viewer, but the dance of their sinuous lines feels quieter and more reserved than the march of forms downstairs. The progression is easy to track in a casual, laidback fashion as one lets the lines circle him or her, like observing colorful fish dart around a pond.

The poetic path laid out for the visitor underscores painting's status as both a material object that shares our space and as a purveyor of experiences that exists in an imaginative,

aesthetic world. At Retrospective Gallery, Metz's paintings alter our sense of bodily presence. As we stand before them, we feel alternately weightless and hyper-aware of our body; first our eyes float, as if disembodied across the abstract color fields of Metz's spare canvases, then we discover our bodies moving from room to room in much the same fashion. Metz thus reminds us that a materialist, process-based practice, if carefully calibrated, can lead to a profound visual and phenomenological experience that elevates perception at the same time as it offers a radical respite from the disconnections and distractions of the contemporary world.