

## Artist Profile – Julie Mehretu

b. 1970 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; lives and works New York City and Berlin, Germany

Mehretu grew up in Ethiopia, and during her childhood, the Ethiopian political climate was rapidly shifting; meaning there was increased violence and oppression. In 1977 Mehretu and her family fled to East Lansing, Michigan, before she attended Kalamazoo College and then the Rhode Island School of Design. Her father was a professor of geography, a subject that would later play a huge role in her large scale printmaking and painting.

Mehretu's work is about energy; the movement of the line work and the movement of the images as a whole. It relates to the atmospheric nature of places, the essence of space and time in transition, and the progression of landscapes with human intervention and environmental forces. A typical reference and image Mehretu uses is a map, whether an actual deconstructed map, an architectural drawing, or city plans, she uses some kind of geometrical layout. Mehretu depicts a chaotic landscape using an abstract style with city planning as her inspiration.

Mehretu's work often relates to history, and micro versus macro. Common themes are disorder, displacement, community, and chaos, Mehretu wants to address the effects of power, inequity, trauma, migration, and environmental devastation. Mehretu's prints and paintings are like landscapes, although not outright recognizable as landscapes, they are a scrambled jumble of landscape fragments depicting change and transformation. Mehretu claims that the reason she created these types of works were so she could try and make sense of who she was in her time and space and political environment.

While working, Mehretu takes the time to build up thin layers of work so that they form a final wax-like surface, she finishes off her pieces by adding thin lines of pencil, pen, or paint. To create her works, Mehretu uses a mixture of different types of Guerra paints; gloss paint and silica-based paint, and she sprays the material on the painting before sanding it down to create a smooth, transparent surface. Mehretu has received many awards and grants, most notably the American Art Award from the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the MacArthur Fellowship.

A few of Mehretu's works include *Currents 95 (1)*; which discusses the relationship between militarism and consumerism, while also including symbolic properties of architecture, *The Residual (2)*, and *Stadia 3 (3)*; part three of a three-part series depicting stadium architecture and the underlying feeling of the stadium as a place of gathering and emotional struggle.



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