



GEMINI G.E.L. AT JONI MOISANT WEYL

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INSIDE ART

By CAROL VOGEL

Abstract Meditations



Auguries, © Gemini G.E.L.^{LLC} and Julie Mehretu

Julie Mehretu's "Auguries" is part of four solo exhibitions accompanying the "Ring" cycle.

A 15-foot-long abstract etching was hanging on a wall in Julie Mehretu's sun-filled Chelsea studio last week. A combination of delicate markings reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy, scribbles that vaguely resemble Cy Twombly canvases and bolder architectural shapes, it is to be the centerpiece of "Notations After the Ring," an exhibition at the Metropolitan Opera's Gallery Met, the four-year-old lobby exhibition space.

The show is opening on Tuesday, the day after the premiere of "Das Rheingold," the first installment of the director Robert Lepage's new production of the "Ring" cycle. A solo exhibition will accompany each of the four operas in the cycle.

What hung in the studio was a proof of the final etching, minus a grid that divides the finished composition into 12 equal parts, a gesture that the artist said was intended as a kind of pacing not unlike a



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musical composition. Called “Auguries,” the work grew out of the visual language she explored in a suite of six paintings that make up “Grey Area,” a show on view at the Guggenheim Museum in New York through Oct. 6.

“I had just finished those big paintings,” Ms. Mehretu said, “and after a project like that I usually do a group of drawings or prints.”

So when she was approached by Dodie Kazanjian, the Gallery Met’s director, to create work pegged to “Das Rheingold,” Ms. Mehretu said, the challenge intrigued her because “when I’m working I am usually listening to music, and I have always been interested in the juxtaposition of looking at images and listening.”

The Wagner epic also reminded her of Berlin, where she has been living on and off since a residency at the American Academy there in 2007 and where she has enjoyed going to the opera.

Ms. Kazanjian said she had thought Ms. Mehretu would be the right artist to pair with the first “Ring” opera because “Julie’s work is symphonic and continuous in the same way as Wagner’s is.” She added that Ms. Mehretu’s “layered compositions — sometimes as many as four, five or more layers laid on top of one another — give the work great complexity and depth.”

In addition to the abstract etching, the show will include nine black-and-white drawings — graphite on paper — that are abstract in composition. “There are always lessons I learn from paintings and images I want to pull out from them and take further,” Ms. Mehretu said.

She has also been working on a large painting based on the facade of the 19th-century Bayreuth opera house in Germany, which was designed to Wagner’s specifications expressly for his operas. The canvas, which is layered as a kind of visual kaleidoscope, depicts the building as though it were in motion, folding in and out of itself. “It records many of the architectural changes that happened and ones that didn’t,” Ms. Mehretu said.

Operagoers will be able to see that painting not in the show but at the top of the majestic staircase on the Met’s grand tier level.