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Fabiola Menchelli, “our sharp line of sight”

by Jody Zellen

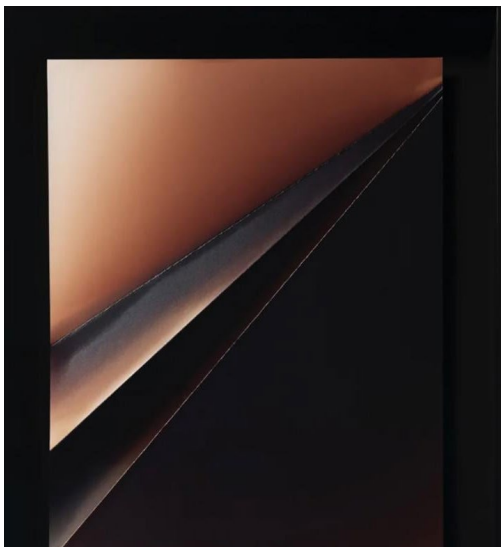
Marshall Gallery, Santa Monica, September 11 - November 7, 2026



Fabiola Menchelli, “Glass-Off,” 2026



Fabiola Menchelli, “holding light,” 2016



Fabiola Menchelli, “Quantum Vector,” 2026

Fabiola Menchelli is a Mexico City-based artist who primarily makes camera-less photographs, something akin to color photograms. Her images may at first appear to be straightforward studies of form and color, as they are created by folding photosensitive paper in the darkroom and exposing it to colored enlarger light. Menchelli’s process turns out to be more complex, labor intensive and unpredictable than simply placing objects onto photo paper. Her creativity blossoms in the darkroom where she folds the paper in total darkness and exposes sections of it to enlarger light. She also changes the orientation of the paper during exposure and it is this movement, as well as her subtle choreography of the color filters, that makes the resulting images unique.

Spotlit across deep maroon/magenta walls are more than two dozen of these prismatic, camera-less chromogenic works. Though essentially a photographer, Menchelli shares concerns with the California Light and Space artists. Like them, she is interested in the ways light and volume can be captured, represented and experienced, as well as how it shapes human perception. While the original California Light and Space artists frequently created sculptures or room-sized installations, Menchelli’s framed photographic prints have a dimensionality that parallels the impact of the sculptural works that inspire Menchelli.

Many of the individual works are presented in groupings that allow viewers to notice subtle differences between them. For example, three 14 by 11 inch pieces (all 2026) are hung side-by-side on a wall separated by only a few inches. They have been folded in such a way that they form triangular shapes that angle outward to the left and right. The brightest areas are light orange-yellow gradually deepening into brown toward the edges. Together, the works flare to suggest the movement of a comet in the night sky. Looking closely, it becomes evident that the different colors are bordered by folds in the paper that form either a light or dark line in the composition, depending on whether that section of the surface was exposed to light.



Fabiola Menchelli, “with your hand on my back (con tu mano en mi espalda),” 2024,
folded C-print photogram, inside custom frame, optimum museum acrylic, 909% UV, 52 x 38 x 4”

Among the larger works, the magenta/rose/red hued “with your hand on my back” (2024), is filled with varied triangular shapes that overlap and undulate within the frame. One can visualize Menchelli wrestling with the oversized paper in the darkroom while twisting and turning to expose different aspects of the paper to the filtered light, trying to keep her fingers from interrupting the continuum of light. There are the same soft boundaries, blind knots, and sharp sight lines. “With your hand on my back” in effect illustrates a private performance. The resulting images document not an external subject but an action: movement through and across light.

Menchelli discusses her work through the language of photography. Despite being imageless and subjectless, these works remain deeply concerned with the fundamental properties of the medium: light, exposure, surface, time, and gesture. Menchelli has said that she is interested in perception and optics, in the possibilities of seeing, as well as understanding what makes seeing possible. Her darkroom experiments turn those questions into physical form. By manipulating paper, light, color, and shadow, she produces sensual images that are simultaneously photographs, objects, and traces of actions. They make visible not simply what we see, but the conditions that allow us to see.

In the colorful array of five images titled “holding light” (2026), the undulation of the paper is more pronounced. Each 24 by 20 inch sheet has a central crease that begins as a white line and then branches out near the top and bottom of the image to become an elongated and abstracted hourglass. One side of each image is a deep black, while the other is a single color: maroon, yellow, blue, green or orange. Each work is mounted inside its own custom wood frame, painted to correspond with the brightest color in each image. Because the photographic paper is not completely flat but compressed within deep frames, the folds cast shadows which make them even more evocative.

Jody Zellen is a LA based writer and artist who creates interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artist’s books. Zellen received a BA from Wesleyan University (1983), a MFA from CalArts (1989) and a MPS from NYU’s Interactive Telecommunications Program (2009). She has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1989. For more information please visit www.jodyzellen.com