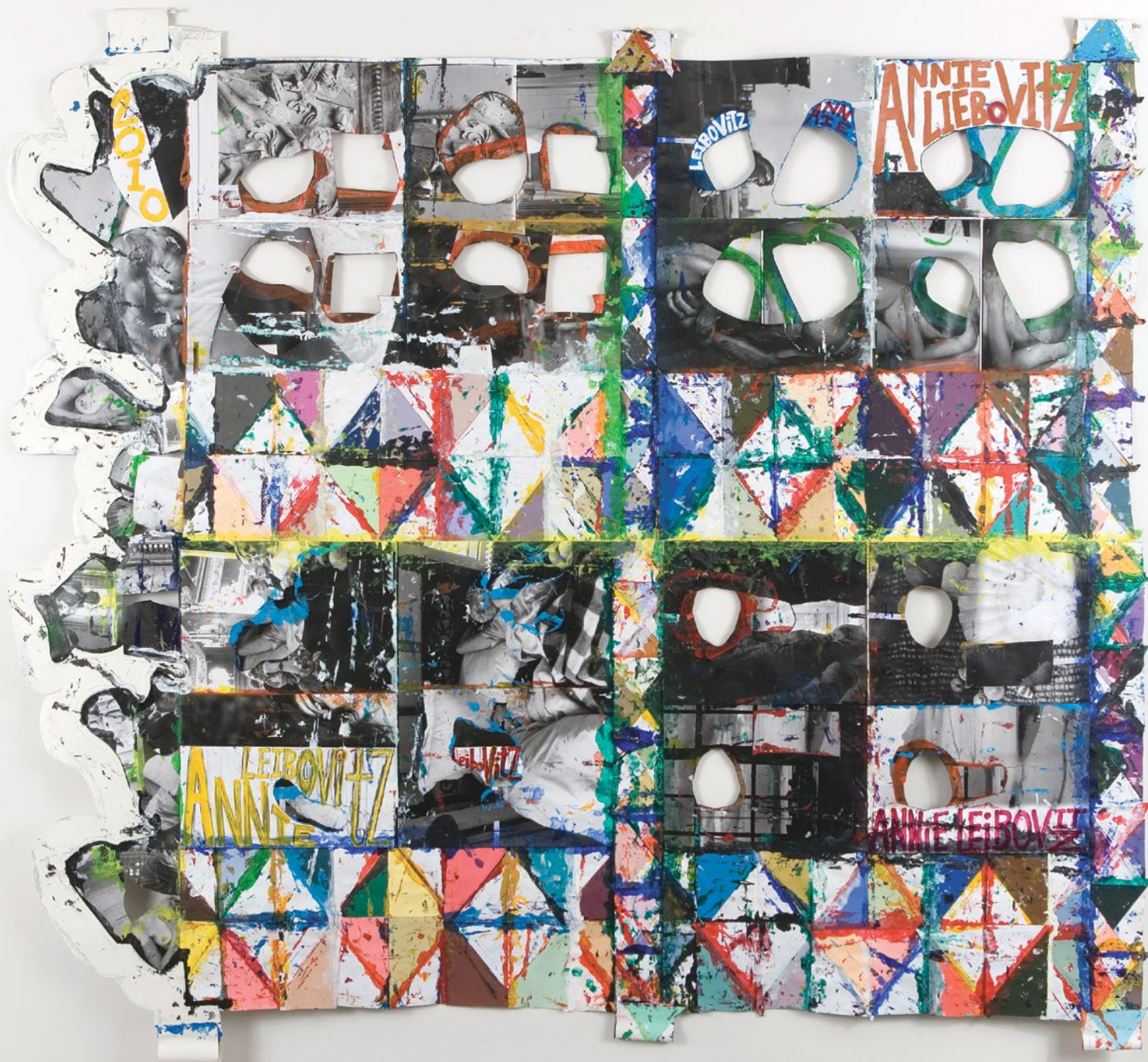


AFTER STRUCTURE

MIKE CLOUD
RICHARD TUTTLE



June 13 – August 2, 2025
USF Contemporary Art Museum



Cover and inside cover: Mike Cloud, *Body Builder Paper Quilt*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The USF Contemporary Art Museum (CAM) organizes and presents temporary exhibitions designed to introduce students, faculty, and the broader community to artists working in the global art arena. The museum is a teaching laboratory with educational programs that connect students and visitors to contemporary art.

For the summer of 2025, CAM presents two concurrent and related exhibitions: *After Structure* and *Beyond Support*. Both exhibitions consider formal structures and the influence of social, cultural, and political activity in the artworks on view.

After Structure, installed in CAM's West Gallery, brings together two artists of different generations: Richard Tuttle and Mike Cloud. The exhibition is curated by Mark Fredricks, Research Administrator at Graphicstudio and the Contemporary Art Museum. Richard Tuttle is a post-minimal artist, currently living and working in New Mexico, who came to USF in the mid '90s to work in residence at Graphicstudio, under the direction of Hank Hine at that time. Tuttle worked on a series of encaustic wax screenprints on muslin, titled *Renaissance Unframed*. These artworks demonstrate Tuttle's experimentation with material and process, reflecting new ideas about composition and the collapsing of the boundaries between his handmade artworks and the surrounding space. Each work is folded and installed according to Tuttle's plan. A bronze sculptural element, #26, was produced as part of *Renaissance Unframed*. It is to be installed on a north south axis, thus disrupting the idea that his art is derived exclusively from the history of western civilization. The long history of collaboration and synergy between the Contemporary Art Museum and Graphicstudio can be seen by CAM's exhibition of *Renaissance Unframed* under my direction in 1996. Demonstrating his eccentric approach, Richard specified the wall color of the galleries by describing the color rather than picking a Pantone swatch.

Mike Cloud is a Chicago-based American painter who, like Richard Tuttle, examines the conditions and structures of painting and examines their contributions to meaning. He shows with Thomas Erben Gallery in Chelsea, known for showing artists that have a strong theoretical grounding. Using mathematical formulas and the logic of the color wheel to create structures for his paintings, he questions the very nature and methodology of making paintings and develops a systematic approach that generates symbolic narratives.

Scott Ferguson, Associate Professor in Humanities and Cultural Studies at the University of South Florida, has contributed an essay for this brochure titled *Care After Structure* that considers the role of structure and unstructure in the works of Richard Tuttle and Mike Cloud. In his conclusion, he points out the role of art and its connection to the moment.

For the exhibition, artworks were borrowed from Thomas Erben Gallery and Graphicstudio. Partial support for the exhibition comes from the USF College of Design, Art & Performance, the Lee and Victor Leavengood Endowment, the Kathleen Binnicker Swann Endowment, the Sara Richter IRA Operations and Program Fund, and The Stanton Storer Embrace the Arts Foundation.

Margaret Miller
Professor and Director
Contemporary Art Museum and Graphicstudio
University of South Florida



Richard Tuttle, *Renaissance Unframed* #16, 1994. Photo by Will Lytch.

CARE AFTER STRUCTURE

Scott Ferguson

After Structure brings together works by Richard Tuttle and Mike Cloud to reconsider a notion that is central to modern visual art: structure.

The question of structure has long divided critics and art historians. Art is autonomous, says one tradition; its structure must be bounded, self-sufficient, and free from external contamination.ⁱ Think Mondrian, Pollack, and Hirschhorn. Art should be integrated into everyday life, retorts the opposition. They point to Duchamp, Warhol, and Bruguera for whom structures are open, participatory, and receptive.ⁱⁱ

After Structure transcends the terms of the dispute by foregrounding far-flung riddles of care.ⁱⁱⁱ In doing so, it challenges what both sides unwittingly share: an attachment to the artwork's physical location in the here-and-now. Commencing from the here-and-now compels art to choose: autonomy or integration, containment or exposure?^{iv} Care, however, is omnipresent. Unlike structure, it concerns everything and anything, admitting no necessary trade-offs between inside and outside, near and far.

What, then, comes after structure? The exhibition answers this query by way of seemingly opposed strategies. At first glance, Tuttle's series of encaustic monotype paintings on muslin appear woefully under-structured. Colorful splotches, smudges, streaks, and drips on white are delicately pinned to the wall, forgoing the solidity and support afforded by customary framing. On closer inspection, the apparent fragility of this arrangement reveals a highly structured configuration sculpted by precise drapings, curls, creases, and folds. Conversely, Cloud's pieces give an initial impression of over-structuring. Painted mottles, figures, signs, and symbols spread across multiple strata of paper, photographs, cloth, and wood. In several works, Cloud deploys

a superabundance of irregularly cut or broken stretcher bars to create criss-crossing patterns, borders, and frames-within-frames. With time, however, structural profusion gives way to systemic precarity, as compounding instances of overlap, mismatch, and imbalance imperil the art's material and semantic integrity.

Through these inversions, Tuttle's and Cloud's works enfold structural insufficiency and excess into a single dynamic that construes aesthetic form as a problem of boundless care. Breaking with dominant models of structure, care circumvents eternal oscillations between openness and closure, unity and dissolution. It denies hard ontological boundaries, on one hand, and radical lawlessness, on the other hand. In *After Structure*, aesthetic saliencies, fissures, and edges admit no primordial exclusion. Smudges, crumples, and shards show little tendency toward disintegration. When Tuttle forsakes traditional framing, we discover quickly that any attempt to flee care's responsibilities routes us back to fresh aesthetic quandaries and needs. In this deliberate destabilization, Tuttle compels us to consider: How else might we buttress social forms when customary supports become inadequate? When Cloud's contributions multiply structure to the point of bewilderment, dozens of fresh vulnerabilities and hazards emerge that even the utmost care cannot master. In this labyrinthine complexity, Cloud poses a vital question: How to heed exigencies and complications that develop from fervid organization?

In this, care after structure demands a commitment to what might be called *remote co-presence*. Care is irreducible to proximity. Its forms do not merely circulate from one place to another. Its causal horizon requires no immediate displacements. To the contrary, care convenes meaning in disparate locales at once. Its forms engage non-adjacent events and concerns. Its causality encompasses the whole of collectivity. The mysteries



Richard Tuttle, *Renaissance Unframed #21*, 1994. Photo by Will Lytch.



Richard Tuttle, *Renaissance Unframed* #10, 1994. Photo by Will Lytch.

of belonging—of joy as well as suffering—remain inescapably ubiquitous. Why should art proceed any differently?

In *After Structure*, care's remote co-presence turns the conventional image of structure on its head. Take Tuttle's series of twenty-five monotype paintings, tellingly titled *Renaissance Unframed*, which was completed at Graphicstudio in 1995. Visibly indebted to both Minimalism and Conceptualism, Tuttle's frameless canvases lend painting's surfaces palpable, even sculptural, qualities. Yet the works' conceptual gesture is hardly unidirectional; it does not advance from flatness to volume à la Minimalism. From start to finish, surface markings diversely shape the muslin's perceived texture, pliability, and weight. Reciprocally, each sculpted pleat, bend, and crinkle communicates from afar no less than Tuttle's painterly inscriptions. It is not simply that the hand of the artist is forever absent. By relying on museum or gallery officials to carry out the artists' detailed instructions for pinning, hanging, and folding, Tuttle's canvases indicate that art depends on constant mediation at a remove.

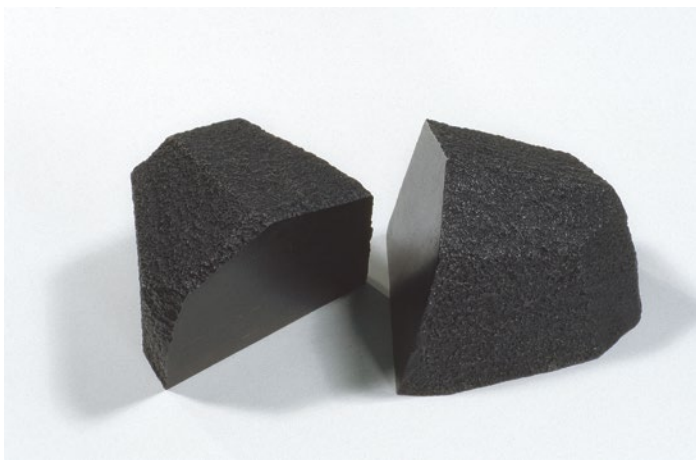
It is tempting to read the heavy bronze floor sculptures that accompany *Renaissance Unframed* as stabilizing perceptual anchors for viewers faced with the uncanny origami of Tuttle's painted fabric. It turns out, however, that these ponderous elements participate in mediations that are no less remote and playful. The sculptures are cast from a Styrofoam carving then coated



Richard Tuttle, *Renaissance Unframed* #6, 1994. Photo by Will Lytch.

with a jet-black patina. Their contours recall the roughness of basalt, the igneous rock that Robert Smithson arranged *en masse* in his monumental land art sculpture, *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Yet the impenetrable density and smooth inner faces of Tuttle's sculptures maintain the trappings of highly manufactured artifacts. The sculptures come in pairs, each half giving the appearance of having been sliced neatly in two. Although circumstances vary, installation guidelines instruct exhibitors to fit the two parts together and place them on the floor precisely one foot in front of each wall hanging. Positioned this way, Tuttle's bronze sculptures at once activate and whimsically undermine minimalist phenomenology. With Minimalism, what Robert Morris' once characterized as "the autonomous and literal nature of sculpture" puts into question the corporeal orientation and movement of artist and viewer in a manner that trades painterly illusionism for direct reckonings with a universal gravity. Minimalism, at least on this account, achieves art's elusive dream of autonomy by contracting gravity's all-consuming pull into a circumscribed arena—one where freedom emerges by leveraging inner balance against outward resistance.

When it comes to Tuttle's floor sculptures, however, Morris's "obdurate, literal mass[es]" become optical and signifying riddles, which mediate physical things and forces from the jump.^{vi} The sculptures present a tripping hazard to viewers engrossed by the wall hangings—a subtle challenge to museum officials striving to balance aesthetics with safety. One wonders:



Richard Tuttle, *Renaissance Unframed* #26, 1995. Photo by Will Lytch.



Mike Cloud, *Rabbit Quilt*, 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

Is litigation merely another medium in the artist's toolbox? Tuttle's instructions recommend the use of a compass to align the two pieces along the north-south axis of the exhibition space and, of course, the planet. In this sense, the pieces function as geometric points that, together, form a line that wraps around the globe. As a consequence, Tuttle's sculptures simultaneously satirize and profoundly amplify routine museum safeguards—floor demarcations, signage, and vigilant personnel—employed to preserve artistic works. Where exactly does the essence of the artwork reside? When, if ever, does concern end?

With Cloud's ultra-structured fabrications, *After Structure* turns care's ambit toward persons, domains, and events that one will likely never know or experience in any direct sense. In contemporary parlance, the established term for such phenomena is "parasocial," defined as one-sided and ostensibly imaginary relations with celebrities, influencers, or fictional characters with whom one has no immediate or mutual interactions. Social scientists and cultural commentators regularly evaluate the costs and benefits of parasocial relations. Parasocial investments can be beneficial in moderate doses, they claim. Yet because this discourse fundamentally pathologizes physical separation and unreciprocated feelings, purveyors of such reasoning fret that inordinate parasocial devotion is damaging to psychological well-being.^{vii}

Cloud's work weighs questions of remote association from a more salutary vantage. Cloud does not assume an atomized subject, whose flirtations with real and make-believe strangers teeters dangerously between health and illness. Instead, his art affirms sociality's wide breadth at the outset. From here, Cloud deploys what he describes as "a wide range of marks, symbols,

motifs, palettes and forms" to query traumas and ecstasies, fascinations and repulsions. The resulting lexicon is singular, heterogeneously shared, and thoroughly social. Cloud reports that he is frequently inspired by contemporary news stories. Sometimes, he includes URL addresses for news sources within the compositions of works themselves. When Cloud variously problematizes and hyperbolizes structure, it is this captivating realm of parasociality that commands our attention.

Take *Rabbit Quilt* (2008), which treats mismatched pajamas as canvas and make-shift frame. The pajama bottoms display the queer children's television character SpongeBob SquarePants in pirate paraphernalia. The tank top comes from U. S. illustrator Jim Benton's cynical novelty brand, It's Happy Bunny. It features a pink, smiling bunny flanked below by a less-than-clever slogan: "You are perfect—except for 9 or 10 things." (More acerbic quips from the same line of merchandise include, "Hi Loser" and "You suck, and that's sad.") Here, Cloud joins top and bottom in a roughly hewn fashion to construct something like a quilt of 1990's pop juvenilia, a cross-section of high-neoliberal commodity culture.

Significantly, *Rabbit Quilt's* central seam draws attention to micro-generational rifts between the inclusive zaniness of SpongeBob and the misanthropic irony of Benton's black-pilled cutesiness. As a result, "tops" and "bottoms" (in multiple senses) bristle uneasily side by side. Across the textiles, Cloud paints an impressionistic calico rabbit in mid-sprint, which enmeshes the aforementioned rift in '90's youth culture in wider historical thickets. Is this a primordial cave painting of a totemic animal that is spellbound by movement? Is it roadkill flattened pajamas—and-all by a careless semi-truck? Is it Br'er Rabbit, the anti-



Mike Cloud, *S of B*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

authoritarian trickster from the Afro-American oral tradition, later white-washed by Walt Disney's offensive mixed-animation feature, *Song of the South* (1948)? The answer, of course, is an all-encompassing yes. *Rabbit Quilt* thickens parasociality's historical dimensions. It ensconces us in intimate and ongoing entanglements from which no person is exempt. The artwork tenders no stock judgments. It intensifies ethical evaluation and political accountability as it stages a wide-ranging aesthetic inquiry into seemingly unrelated pasts.

Cloud's most disquieting entries are his so-called "hanging paintings." The hanging paintings comprise a series of triangular constructions from which dangle several off-the-rack belts that serve as nooses. These works include *S of B* (2016), *Ames 2017* (2019), *Uehara 2011* (2019), and *Khan 2013* (2019). Cloud deems them portraits because they represent persons who died by means of hanging—though the works show only hand-written names rather than visual likenesses. Some of the paintings are group portraits, including multiple names dispersed across several wooden stretcher bars. As a consequence, the hanging paintings foster unlikely and sometimes unnerving associations among strangers, including museum attendees. Exemplary is *S of B*, which names Sandra Bland, the 28-year-old Black woman whose alleged 2015 suicide in a Texas jail was fiercely contested by protestors opposed to racialized police brutality. Yet it also identifies actor David Carradine, rumored to suffocate from auto-erotic asphyxiation, and model Cheyenne Brando, daughter of Marlon Brando, who took her own life after suffering years of neglect, abuse, and mental illness.

The point, it seems, is not to flatten differences between heterogeneous social conditions. Surely Cloud, a contemporary

Black artist, has little interest in forcing equivalences between Bland, Carradine, and Brando. The idea, rather, is to play up resonances across differences, such that what counts as death's proper context is socially defamiliarized and reconfigured. With this, the social loss of Bland accrues a cryptic communal importance beyond the confines of an isolated Black history. It would require many more pages to do justice to *S of B*'s polysemic title, painted cubes and swirls, tottering rocket-like architecture, and uncanny correspondences, not to mention the manifold aesthetic and social connotations at stake in Cloud's references to "hanging." Even so, my sense is that none of this dilutes the singularity of death; rather, it deepens and transmogrifies hanging's collective implications.

I would be remiss if, by way of conclusion, I did not draw out *After Structure*'s relevance for the present moment. Since January 20, 2025, punishing fiscal austerity and lawless state violence have lacerated communities, destroyed vital infrastructures, and undermined public trust both across the United States and around the world. The current administration operates under a fiercely zero-sum conception of structure. Because they presume that there is never enough to go around, the powers that be fortify structure to protect a chosen minority. Everyone else is forsaken as internal parasites or expelled as external threats. Alternatively, *After Structure* teaches that there is no outside; collectivity is replete with untold riches; and nobody can exhaust the unending enigmas of care.

ⁱ A contemporary defense of autonomy can be found in Nicholas Brown, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

ⁱⁱ For a recent affirmation of the integrative approach, see Grant Kester, *Beyond the Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Avant-Garde to Socially Engaged Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024).

ⁱⁱⁱ Scott Ferguson, *Declarations of Dependence: Money, Aesthetics & the Politics of Care* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

^{iv} To be sure, aesthetic theory has articulated the central binary between autonomy and integration (or "heteronomy") in complex ways. For Theodor Adorno, autonomy involves a contradictory gambit wherein art's utopian impulse toward freedom is only realized when its aesthetic structure fails to perfectly cohere. Jacques Derrida taught us to deconstruct the "truth in painting" by unleashing unsettling interdependencies between inside and outside that frames of all kinds are called upon to contain. Philosophers of process and difference such as Gilles Deleuze prioritize flows of becoming that at once undercut and overwhelm structural boundaries. Still, even when avowing the porous, intertwined, and unstable, such discourses constrain structure within a restricted and zero-sum model of art that is grounded in the here-and-now. See, Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020); Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Thomas F.H. Meek (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

^v Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (Feb. 1966): 42 - 44.

^{vi} Robert Morris, "Notes of Sculpture."

^{vii} Thanks to Will Beaman for educating me about the anti-social assumptions inherent in the discourse of parasociality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Scott Ferguson is Associate Professor in Humanities and Cultural Studies at the University of South Florida and editor for the Money on the Left Editorial Collective. His publications have appeared in venues such as *Screen*, *Public Culture*, *Liminalities*, and *Boundary 2 Online*. His book, *Declarations of Dependence: Money, Aesthetics & the Politics of Care*, was published in 2018 by University of Nebraska Press.

CHECKLIST

MIKE CLOUD

***American Star*, 2024**

oil on canvas, wooden broomsticks and cooking spoons
100 x 63 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***Ames 2017*, 2019**

oil on canvas with mixed media
26 x 96 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***Body Builder Paper Quilt*, 2010**

altered photography book, Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint
60 x 67 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***Cantanheade Portrait*, 2019**

oil on canvas
70 x 70 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***Khan 2013*, 2019**

oil on canvas with mixed media
42 x 19 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***Rabbit Quilt*, 2008**

oil and clothes on canvas
42 x 32 x 4 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***S of B*, 2016**

oil on linen
100 x 80 x 5 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

***Uehara 2011*, 2019**

oil on canvas with mixed media
51 x 32 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

RICHARD TUTTLE

Renaissance Unframed #1

19-1/2 x 25 inches

Renaissance Unframed #5

19-1/2 x 22-1/2 inches

Renaissance Unframed #6

13-3/4 x 22-1/2 inches

Renaissance Unframed #7

21 x 25-1/2 inches

Renaissance Unframed #9

15 x 25 inches

Renaissance Unframed #10

18-1/2 x 22-1/2 inches

Renaissance Unframed #11

20 x 22-1/2 inches

Renaissance Unframed #16

7-3/8 x 25-7/8 inches

Renaissance Unframed #17

24-3/8 x 21-1/8 inches

Renaissance Unframed #18

18-3/8 x 22-5/8 inches

Renaissance Unframed #21

11-1/8 x 22-1/2 inches

Renaissance Unframed #22

25 x 39-3/8 inches

1994

encaustic monotype paintings on muslin

Published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL

Renaissance Unframed #17 University of South Florida Collection

***Renaissance Unframed #26*, 1995**

cast bronze sculpture with black patina

8 x 4 x 3-1/4 inches

Published by Graphicstudio, University of South Florida Collection

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After Structure is curated by Mark Fredricks, organized by USF Contemporary Art Museum, and supported in part by the USF College of Design, Art & Performance, the Lee and Victor Leavengood Endowment, the Kathleen Binnicker Swann Endowment, the Sara Richter IRA Operations and Program Fund, and The Stanton Storer Embrace the Arts Foundation. The Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.