

Thomas Erben Gallery



Mike Cloud

Works on Paper

September 8 - October 22, 2022

There will be an artist talk on Saturday, September 17, followed by a reception.

Thomas Erben is excited to present **Mike Cloud's *Works on Paper***, an exhibition centered on a medium which the artist views as an integral and substantive part of his practice. These works - mainly collages, composed of bits and pieces from the physical world - function as a laboratory for ideas and evolve in tandem with the artist's paintings, while also developing along independent lines integral to the medium itself. Starting with examples from 2003, a time when Cloud was still at graduate school, ***Works on Paper*** gives an insight into some of his central motivations, and their increasingly complex articulation.

The series ***Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*** (2003), demonstrates a use of ubiquitously available materials, in this case cardboard as backing, combined with store-bought stretchers into which the artist staples his collages. Cutting out segments of body parts from Arbus's eponymous book, he arranges these into "archetypes" like ***Brooklyn Jewish Girl with a Mexican Friend*** or ***Masked Woman at a Masked Ball with Her Husband***, each titled as their source photograph. It is a key concern of Cloud's that "the world comes into my work, though not through my inner life," and one way he achieves this is by looking through the eyes of others; later examples include Sally Mann, Annie Leibovitz and Nan Goldin.

As evidence of the link between source material and finished collage, the installation *Leibovitz Orange* (2008) includes the books from which its collage elements were extracted.

Later dissatisfied with this manner of separate display, Cloud developed his *Paper Quilts* series (2010). Here, identical pages from two Annie Leibovitz photobooks are glued back to back and assembled as quilts, measuring about 60 x 60 inches and displayed hanging from the ceiling. Each quilt is punctured by cutouts of what Roland Barthes would describe as the photograph's "punctum" – the element that "pierced" Cloud's subjective perception – which is then indexically glued onto one of the vertical edges.

Quilts are usually seen as "craft", where the hours of labor required for production become a constituent part of their value, a measure which generally does not apply to art. To complicate this difference, Cloud colors the glue he is using, thus making his handiwork visible as an integral part of the artwork's aesthetic value.

What constitutes as value is of central interest to Cloud, also alluded to in the *Chip Bag Monoprints* (2009), for which he used Dorito bags as printing plates, and undermined in *Helen Frankenthaler's Obit (No. 1-18)* (2014), which subverts ads from Artforum Magazine. In these works, the words announcing exhibitions of famous artists and their galleries are disassembled and nonsensically reconfigured, while still hinting at their original meaning.

As an example of how Cloud's collaging methods migrate into his painting practice, the show includes *Seven Toys on a Maze*, from 2006. Here, the artist's idiosyncratic choice of material moves even further into the three-dimensional, extending the sculptural aspect of his work.

Cloud's painting practice has undergone a significant material shift over the past 20 years: The set of symbols, canvas shapes, color and surface have expanded, switched positions and evolved a great deal. His work on paper has also evolved, but what connects these projects – some separated by a decade or more – is the artist's desire to reconcile himself to the world, as it is, through his artmaking process. His collages are both cultural *quilts* that interweave disparate ways of depicting, and social *nets* that suspend artist and viewer within a shared, contested visual reality.

After studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Cloud earned his MFA from Yale in 2003. His work has been extensively shown at venues such as **MoMA P.S.1**, **Marianne Boesky Gallery**, **White Columns**, **Max Protetch**, **Apexart**, and has been included in group exhibitions, such as *Frequency* at the **Studio Museum in Harlem**; *The long Dream*, **Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago**; *Tough Connections*, **Kunstverein Aschaffenburg**; as well as in galleries such as **Honor Fraser** and **The Landing** (both Los Angeles). In addition to numerous reviews and interviews, his work was part of *Painting Abstraction* by **Bob Nickas**, Phaidon Press (2009). He has been awarded the inaugural *Chiara Award* from the **Headlands Center for the Arts**, CA; a **New York Foundation for the Arts** Fellowship and residencies at the **Meulensteen Art Centre** in the Netherlands as well as the **Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program** in New York.

Cloud is currently an Associate Professor at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL.

Works on Paper is the artist's seventh exhibition with the gallery (which includes solo presentations at **The Independent**, 2015; **Art Basel Miami Beach**, 2016, and **Frieze London**, 2020).