

Thomas Erben Gallery



Jain cosmological diagram

Mike Cloud *Holistic Abstraction*

September 5 - October 26, 2024

Opens Thursday, September 5, 6 - 8:30pm

Thomas Erben is thrilled to present *Holistic Abstraction*, Mike Cloud's new body of work developed during his fellowship at the American Academy in Rome earlier this year. Retaining key features of his practice, Cloud expands his concept of painting's intricate relationship with death to now embrace – though from an impersonal perspective – the full range of human experience.

In these new paintings, Cloud replaces traditional wooden stretcher bars with handmade mops, which he has fashioned from broomsticks and tattered canvas strips. These mops are structural elements taking on the shapes of stars, arrows, fish or others.

Cloud continues his practice of roughly stapling his canvas surfaces onto their wooden supports in a way that leaves the structure slightly visible, undermining painting's authoritative status in its inviting DIY ethos and turning it into an object instead of a pristine, level surface.

The mop structures crisscross at irregular angles and often multiple times, creating mosaic-like, collaged surfaces describing iconic forms. The extending mop heads bestow an air which veers between festive and ridiculous, pom poms and scare crows and also allude to the African American wedding tradition of “jumping the broom”.

The artist has used totemic shapes as painting structures before, but here the paintings resist hanging flat against the wall to a degree that transmutes the works into “standards”, portable flags or signs that can be carried into different contexts, such as battles, processions or protests.

Cloud states: “Perspective is the only source of meaning. By foregoing a specific point of view, painted objects can touch upon all sorts of familiar, disparate and contentious subjects, images and motifs while remaining fundamentally abstract. A holistic abstraction so to speak.”

This is the artist’s eighth exhibition with the gallery, which includes solo presentations at Art Basel Miami Beach, Frieze London and Independent New York. Most recently (in 2024), Cloud received the **Jules Guerin Rome Prize** as well as a **Guggenheim Fellowship** and staged *Called Ahead*, his first exhibition in Spain at **Fahrenheit Madrid**.

After studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Cloud earned a MFA from Yale in 2003. His work has shown extensively at venues such as **MoMA P.S.1**, **Marianne Boesky**, **White Columns**, **Max Protetch**, **Apexart**, as well as at **Honor Fraser** and **The Landing** (both Los Angeles). Institutional exhibitions include *Frequency* at the **Studio Museum in Harlem**; *The Long Dream*, **Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago**; and *Tough Connections*, **Kunstverein Aschaffenburg**, to name a few. In addition to an extensive number of reviews and interviews, his work is included in *Painting Abstraction* by **Bob Nickas**, Phaidon Press (2009).

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