

Thomas Erben Gallery

## MIKE CLOUD



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*Bad Faith and Universal Technique*

Solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, September 11 – October 18, 2014

Installation view

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Installation view, project space (Left: Mike Cloud; right: Dona Nelson)

# Thomas Erben Gallery



## MIKE CLOUD

*Removed Individual*, 2013

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on canvas

240 x 120 inches

\$45,000



# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Dialogue of Growth*, 2013

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on canvas

91 ½ 30 ½ inches

\$16,000

# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Lesser Evil*, 2013

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on canvas

43 x 39 inches

\$9,000

# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Paper Elysium*, 2014

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on canvas

85 x 51 inches

\$16,000



# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Traveling Barricade*, 2014

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on canvas

49 x 80 inches

\$13,000



# Thomas Erben Gallery



## **MIKE CLOUD**

*Dick Cheney Paper Quilt, 2010*

Altered photography book, Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint

60 x 67 inches

\$9,000



# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Untitled (For Christ's Sake), 2013*

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on Paper

18 x 24 inches

\$3,500



# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Flattery*, 2013

Signed by the artist verso

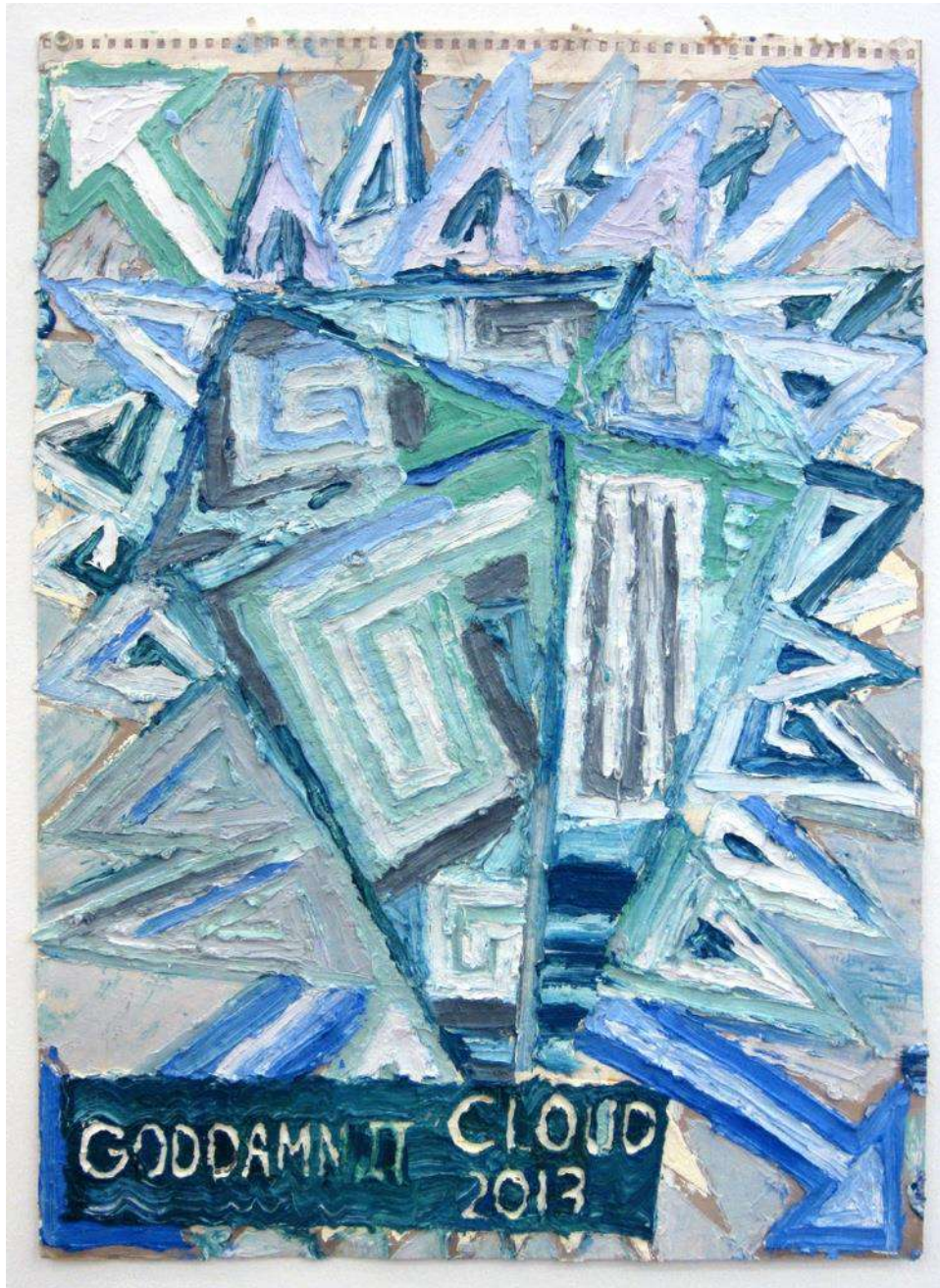
Oil on paper

18 x 24 inches

\$3,500



# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*Untitled (Goddammit Cloud), 2013*

Signed by the artist verso

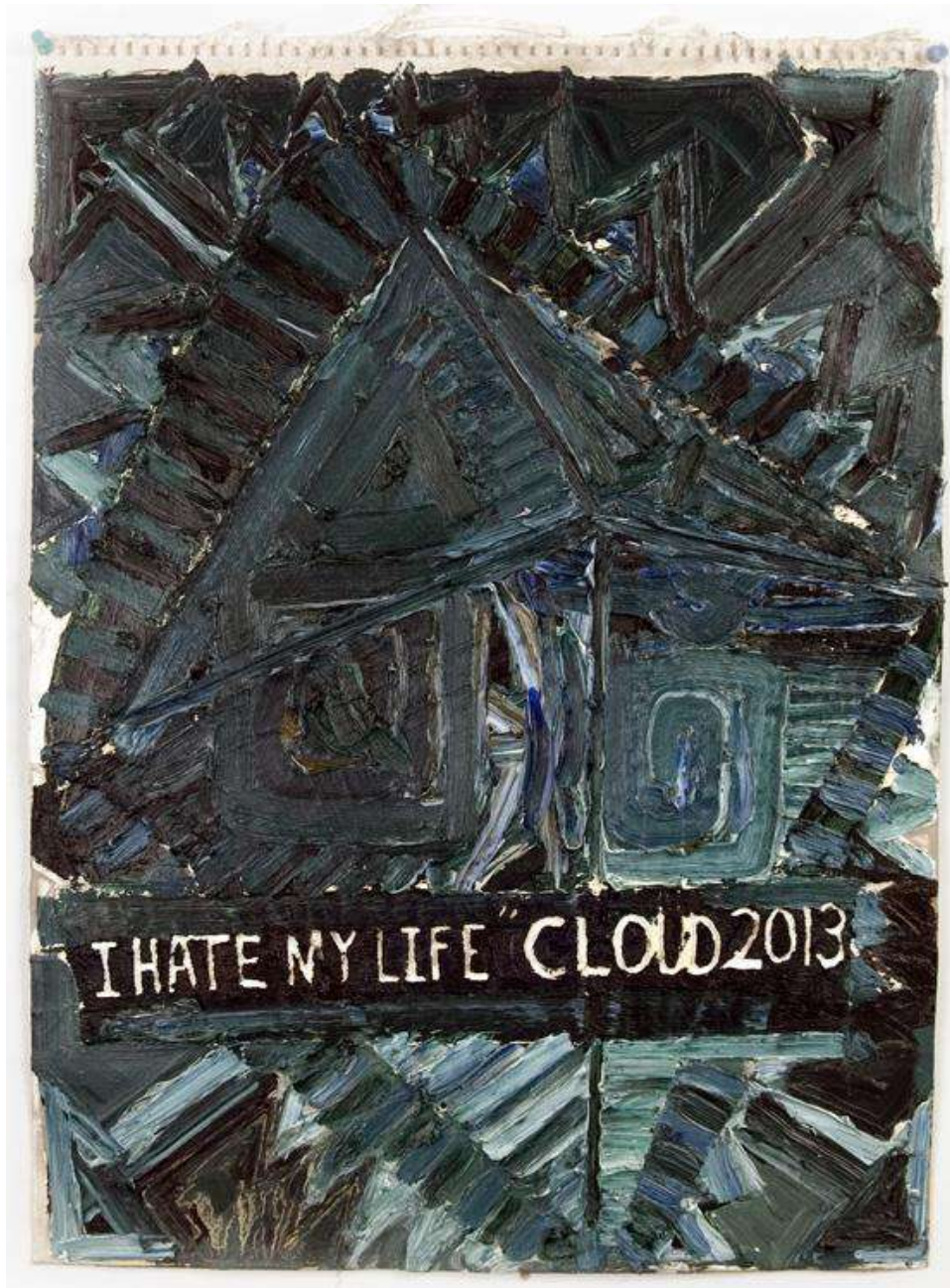
Oil on Paper

18 x 24 inches

\$3,500



# Thomas Erben Gallery



**MIKE CLOUD**

*North Star, 2013*

Signed by the artist verso

Oil on paper

18 x 24 inches

\$3,500





THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART PLUS  
EXTENDING THE COVERAGE OF THE PRINT JOURNAL

## Bad Faith and Universal Technique

### Mike Cloud at Thomas Erben Gallery, NYC

Diana McClure



Mike Cloud,  
*Traveling  
Barricade* (back),  
2013, o/c, 80x49



Mike Cloud, *Paper  
Elysium*, 2014, o/c,  
85x51

suggesting the unresolved nature of multiple trains of thought laid out on canvas and paper. Color in this context, as seen in the painting *Untitled* (Goddammit Cloud), seems to suggest it is in use as a tool to mark variations in thought as opposed to beauty or mood.



Mike Cloud, *Removed Individual*, 2013,  
oil/c, 10x20'

Mike Cloud has not been seduced by conceptual art. That is not to say there is not a conceptual framework to his aesthetic. It appears that he has taken a most challenging approach to his creative instinct, engaging the intersection of concept and emotion to animate ideas in his work.

The first idea one encounters at the entrance to Mike Cloud's exhibition *Bad Faith and Universal Technique* is *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite*, the rallying cry of the French Revolution. These words, part of the sculpture *Traveling Barricade*, are painted in white, blue and red and are encased in a small triangle on the floor that could easily be overlooked. Above it a torn piece of natural canvas with a slash of white paint across it hangs like a flag of surrender. Perhaps a comment on what it takes to convince another of an idea?

The clashing or the integration of ideas is encountered once again in the painting *Paper Elysium*, which houses a left leaning Confederate flag, pyramids, and trees. Triangles, in the form of shapes, pyramids and stars, are a leitmotif throughout the exhibition. The triangle may speak to concepts of the trine, the harmonious flow of energy that is a potential aspect of all human relations, as in the successful sharing and integration of an idea.

Cloud's material exposure of stretched canvas and stretching bars, his intentionally unpolished presentation and the feeling of organized chaos generated by his paintings, suggest a controlled experiment. What happens when disparate ideas come together within a framework, literally?

His work has an aspect reminiscent of the unpolished flamboyance of William Pope.L's artwork (see Pope.L reference image below). But close viewing of Cloud's art reveals an extremely conscious engagement with imperfection and structure. This is not work of a rebellious nature. It appears to be a sincere investigation of the static nature of ideas in relation to the rich inner lives of individuals.

Color scales and color theory are at work throughout the exhibition in cool palettes, arrangements that flow, and ones that clash. The weight or force of Cloud's curiosity reveals itself through thick paint applied in arduous layers

The body, alive and as a corpse, reverberates through form and shape throughout Cloud's work. Handprints, footprints, heart prints, and male anatomy are featured in the triangles that form a red-pink and a yellow-brown six-pointed star in the piece *Removed Individual*. This nod to touch, feeling and desire, is accompanied by a rainbow colored flag that hangs from the bottom right of the piece. As a whole this work seems to reference ideas of femininity through its use of yellow and pink, Jewish culture through its use of six-pointed stars, and LGBT politics through its reference to a rainbow flag.

The wood frames that enclose unusually shaped canvases throughout the exhibition seem to encourage viewers to think outside the box in new shapes, new frameworks, and new concepts.

The painting *Dialogue of Growth* resembles the shape of a coffin, stands on the floor



Detail, *Traveling Barricade*



Mike Cloud,  
*Untitled*  
(Goddammit  
Cloud), 2013



and leans on the wall. Handprints in blue and green cover the canvas, images of diamonds are repeated and the word "organ" is painted twice in yellow where the head and the heart would

lie in a coffin. The word "organ" placed at the heart center of the coffin is part of a gold link chain. This work of all the works in the exhibition seems the most succinct. It appears to coolly scream at both the suffocating idea and reality of what it means to be a black man in 2014.



Mike Cloud, Dick Cheney Paper Quilt, 2010, altered photography book, Color-Aid paper & acrylic paint, 60x67

*Mike Cloud: Bad Faith and Universal Technique* at Thomas Erben Gallery in New York City is on view through October 25, 2014.

All Mike Cloud images: Courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery.

**Diana McClure** is an art writer based in New York City. She has written for the NYTimes.com, Art Asia Pacific, VIBE magazine, Friedman Benda gallery and the Emilio Sanchez Foundation among others.



Mike Cloud, Dialog of Growth, 2014, o/c, 91.5x30.5



Artist Mike Cloud. Photo: Thomas Erben Gallery



Reference image: William Pope.L's eRacism, 2003, at Allied Works Architecture's Portland Institute of Contemporary Art via m11instalacionunarte

# TWO COATS OF PAINT

Award-winning blogazine, primarily about painting

## EMAIL: Mike Cloud's shopping list

July 23, 2014 12:12 pm



I recently received an announcement for “Bad Faith and Universal Technique,” **Mike Cloud's** September solo show at **Thomas Erben Gallery**. Cloud, born in 1974 in Chicago, graduated from Yale MFA in 2003 and is an assistant professor at Brooklyn College. I have met him at the BC final critiques, where he has a gentle and insightful presence, offering resonant comments to each of the students as they presented their projects, but I've never seen any of his work. According to the press release:

Cloud appropriates well known symbols to reexamine historical events or phenomena, exploring the perspective of survivors rather than winners or losers. His paintings break out of the expected format, taking on irregular shapes and sculptural qualities, sometimes leaving the wall and venturing out into the exhibition space.



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I was struck by the image (posted above) included with the announcement. Titled *Shopping List*, Cloud's painting combines two big structures, shaped like **Stars of David**, with painterly markmaking that seems to reference landscape. The words inscribed denote everyday items that might be on a grocery list, such as milk, cabbage, ketchup, oranges, and honey. In the lower right corner, a small geometric abstraction painted with a rainbow of colors hangs from the main painting.

I'm curious about the rest of the work in the show. Does Cloud explore other forms of religious imagery? Do everyday elements continue to collide with the iconic? What other kinds of text fragments does he use? I'm intrigued—I can't wait to see more of Cloud's work at Erben in September.

"Mike Cloud: Bad Faith and Universal Technique," Thomas Erben, Chelsea, New York, NY. September 11 through October 18, 2014.

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# ARTE FUSE

## Mike Cloud's Bad Faith and Universal Technique at Thomas Erben Gallery

by TATIANA ISTOMINA on 10/07/2014



Image courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery

Mike Cloud's new works now on view at **Thomas Erben Gallery** are more like conventional paintings than anything he produced in several years. The Brooklyn-based artist has been known for his hybrid artworks made of diverse materials: fabric and clothes sewn into quilts, cut-up photography books, Color-Aid paper, plastic, and in some cases, potato chip bags. But even though his new works use only conventional art materials: stretchers, canvas, paper and oil paint – they do not resemble conventional paintings. Cloud's works are unwieldy constructions of stretcher bars joined at various angles into complex shapes, with the bars' exposed edges framing the canvas. Some of the pieces, such as *Paper Elysium* and *Lesser Evil*, take the form of irregular polygons, while others are more complex formations: *Dialog of Growth* consists of two trapezoids stacked vertically to create a structure resembling a coffin-lid, and *Removed Individual* combines



Image courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery



over a dozen of triangular and polygonal segments into the pair of conjoined Stars of David. In addition to these large works, the show includes several medium-size paintings on paper with perforated edge on top, and a freestanding piece titled *Traveling barricade*. Despite the change in the materials and technique, there is a strong sense of continuity between the new paintings and Cloud's earlier works, one of which – *Dick Cheney Paper Quilt* from 2010, hangs in the back of the gallery.



Painted thickly wet-on-wet, with confident and precise brushwork, and complex color schemes, the paintings have a great degree of formal sophistication, which is downplayed by the artist's casual attitude toward his works. There is a curious and pleasant contrast between Cloud's delicate sensitivity to color and textures, and his matter-of-fact handling of the pieces, with their crude frames covered by blotches of paint from the artist's habit of cleaning his brush on the edge of his paintings. The imagery of the works combines simple shapes with words and phrases, some of which seem to be random (*Dream Cabbage*), and others appear to convey a message, either personal (*Goddamit Cloud 2013*), or vaguely political (*BloodDiamond... Diamondcentrism*). The works abound with symbolic and historical references – the Star of David and the Confederate flag being the most obvious examples. Together with words and phrases, the references seem to imply that the paintings have some kind of deeper significance, which may be uncovered if the individual elements – the shapes, the colors, the phrases, are read in just the right way. This impression is false. Colors and shapes in Cloud's works may be politically significant, but in the end, they are simply shapes and colors. The words may be suggestive or evocative, they may wink and nod at the viewer offering her some kind of tantalizing hints – but they have no message to tell. The





paintings resist direct interpretation; they function on the sensory and aesthetic level, through visual rhythms and poetic associations.



Cloud is the kind of artist who has a great trust in the power of shapes and colors, the significance of the mark, the physicality of the objects, and our human capacity to relate to them on some organic level. Cloud's paintings are not simply experiments with materials; they are about something – identity, history, politics – though what exactly we may never possibly know. As the artist maintains in his interviews, painting is an unreliable tool of communication. Shapes, colors and marks mean something, he seems to be certain, but what it is, is unclear, and may never be completely understood, let alone expressed – unless through other shapes, colors and marks. This of course, should negate the artist's intention of communicating anything except the trivial formalist assertion that particular shapes, colors and marks may exist in some specific configurations. Still Cloud is no formalist, and all his works strain to say something – or if not say, then mumble, hum, or communicate mutely. There is an inherent contradiction in this position, which points to the “bad faith” of the exhibition title – the firm belief that painting's universal technique may be use to express something, despite our inability to ever know what is being expressed.

*Mike Cloud's Bad Faith and Universal Technique at [Thomas Erben Gallery](#)*

**Article by Tatiana Istomina**

**Photography provided by the gallery and the artist**



**Tatiana Istomina (4 Posts)**

Tatiana Istomina is a Russian-born US artist and art blogger. She holds a PhD in geophysics from Yale University (2010) and MFA from Parsons New School (2011). Her works have been included in exhibitions at Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum, The Drawing Center and Gaité Lyrique, among others; she had solo shows in New York and Houston. Istomina has completed several artist residencies, including the ACA residency, the Core Program at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the AIM program at the Bronx museum of art. She was nominated for Dedlaux

foundation fellowship and Kandinsky prize and received awards such as the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the American Austrian Foundation Prize for Fine Arts and Eliza prize.



ARTSEEN

OCTOBER 3RD, 2014

WEBEXCLUSIVE

## MIKE CLOUD *Bad Faith and Universal Technique*

by William Corwin

THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 11 – OCTOBER 18, 2014

A fellow spectator at Mike Cloud's recent exhibition described the largest painting in the show, "Removed Individual," (2013) as the "Buckminster Fuller one." Initially this seemed superficial, based merely on the construction of the piece as a network of visible intersecting stretchers. However, it became increasingly meaningful as the extent and variety of the show sank in. There are many intertwining gestures in Cloud's work and at times the paintings can be overwhelming. There is a high volume of historical detail and specific symbolism being corralled into these works. Despite the seemingly spontaneous expressionism of the execution, there is a layering of subtlety that compliments the comparison to Fuller. "Removed Individual" is the most Fulleresque, combining the symbolism of the six-pointed star with Fuller's Dymaxion map, but all the works exhibit an aesthetic and intellectual resourcefulness. The eccentric form of the canvas and the wordplay and the rebus-like use of imagery on its surface reinforce each other in the same way that the famed inventor's physical creations complimented his zany and altruistic worldview.

Cloud's paintings are entities of tension. The canvas is stapled from the inside surfaces of the stretcher bars, like a skin drying on a frame. The taught fabric becomes a structural force as the self-sustaining perpendiculars of the typical painting are exchanged for unstable acute and obtuse angles that require an outside vector of force to keep them in place. As a result, "Paper Elysium" (2014) an irregular trapezoidal shape, and "Lesser Evil" (2013), an irregular hexagon, both exude a troubling feeling of tensegrity (tensional integrity) that makes their construction very prominent. Indeed, it is this reliance on the very practical applications of stretcher bars that give Cloud's work a resonance with the ever-practical yet ever-fanciful Buckminster Fuller. The stretcher becomes a unit that underlies the growth and expansion of the picture plane.

In the painting contained on "Paper Elysium," thick rich brushstrokes happily lend themselves to reinforcing the notional tension of the form. The trapezoidal



painting is covered corner to corner with a confederate flag, visually pushing the corners outwards. By contrast, “Lesser Evil” is supported by six lines of text that become lines of force emanating from a center point. By their rejection of the right angle, Cloud’s stretcher bar networks naturally fall into 2-D crystalline forms; embracing this, diamonds are frequent signifiers in his work. In “Lesser Evil,” the words function simultaneously as visual supports of the crystalline aspirations of the work, and as text they cycle through the associative meanings of phrases in proximity to the word diamond. “Blood Diamond,” “Pseudo Diamond,” and “Diamond Gate” are played off the visual pun of a paint, wood, and canvas diamond constructed by the artist himself—text metaphors vs. visual ones.

Beyond it’s construction, “Removed Individual” is a meditation on the symbolism of oppression, and an attempt towards the mitigation of the destructive underpinnings of those symbols. Two Judenstern stand next to each other, point-to-point: they are different colors, but some of the colors are familiar as National Socialist categories—purple meant homosexual and yellow meant Jew. Hands, feet, and male and female genitals are painted onto the stars, anthropomorphosizing them, and from the right star a small rainbow banner hangs like a shop sign. There is a humor that is both sharp and pained in its openness, (Are these stars self-portraits? Star-crossed lovers?) The two symbols have been bestowed with a personality the way that a corporate mascot can be generated by putting a pair of eyes or legs on any inanimate object or making a mouse or cat stand on two feet.

This playful addition to a very familiar and sinister shape has jarring and effective consequences: it is a taboo crossing of signals. The visual blow is lessened by thickly and painterly rendered text on the hexagonal body of the star. Two shopping lists are placed side by side, and a John-sian (as in Jasper) visual pun comes into effect. The contents of the list are written out in their respective colors: white rice/brown rice, green tea/black tea, etc. The artist muses on the very personal and rational judgments that go unnoticed when we choose food based on its color. Then, via the stark cruelty of the form of the Star of David armbands switches gears to the practice of color coding people or their religious or sexual associations, and even their skin color.

“Removed Individual” serves as an introduction to Cloud’s at times perplexing free-association of signs and symbols. His openness with some of our most powerful and feared signifiers is liberating. The shaped canvasses and stretched formations lend themselves seamlessly to a penetrating visual contemplation of meaning and shape. At times there is a surfeit of visual information, which can muddy the beautiful mystery that is generated from forms that have tangential but not obvious or overt relationships.

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CONTRIBUTOR

William Corwin



# Art in America

JANUARY 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Mike Cloud:  
*Removed Individual*,  
2013, oil on canvas,  
120 by 240 inches; at  
Thomas Erben.

## MIKE CLOUD

Thomas Erben

Mike Cloud lays it on thick—in his paint application and in his symbolism. Layers of chunky oil paint cover every inch of canvas in the nine works that were on view here. Jewish stars, blood diamonds, the Confederate flag and at least one swastika mixed and mingled with coffins, genitals, detached hands and feet and painted statements about impotence. Cloud staples canvas to the inside of stretchers, instead of stretching around them, so all the pieces are “framed.” His conspicuous brushstrokes, often roughly the width of a human finger, emphasize the directness of a body’s forceful, persistent touch.

Much of the painted text, in particular, looks like it was carved with a finger into cake frosting. The words “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” are painted along the three sides of a small triangular canvas in *Traveling Barricade* (2014), a freestanding object with one canvas perched like a sail on top of others laid flat. Here, the French national motto has a hand-painted protest sign’s awkward combination of vehemence and provisionality—necessary, but only for the moment, as though it might easily be smoothed over, blended in or otherwise reabsorbed into the opaque surface. This feels appropriate for a phrase with a history that reads like the ultimate semiotic soap opera: political-philosophical interests wrangle over the evolving meanings and implications of three words. It’s the initial instance of fickle symbolism that this Chicago-born, Brooklyn-based artist took up in “Bad Faith and Universal Technique,” his first solo exhibition at the gallery and his seventh in New York.

The paintings come in a range of sizes and shapes. Triangles, trapezoids and hexagons become increasingly complex through repetition and distortion; two trapezoids resemble the lid of a coffin in *Dialog of Growth* (2013), for instance. Elsewhere, triangular

canvases multiply into stars and diamonds, creating works that reverberate between the shaped supports and the painted content.

Everything converged in the 10-by-20-foot *Removed Individual* (2013), multiple canvases arranged to form a double Star of David. The perfect center is the diamond-shaped negative space between the stars, where Cloud has a canvas painted so that it resembles a gemstone with jagged facets. In rich sky blue over a ground of reds, yellows, pinks and oranges, the diamond shows off its “fire.” The stars themselves—one red, pink and white, the other yellow, brown and black—are inscribed with a grocery list of foods rendered in their respective colors: oranges, milk, ketchup, honey. Cloud’s awareness of the trouble with such tight identification between hue and object is manifested through his insistence on using color in an ever-fluid spectrum. From his inclusion of actual color scales (tones of blue in the lower left; a rainbow panel on the lower right) to the blending that occurs when wet paint of different hues meets (emphasized by globs wiped on his stretcher bars), one color is always becoming another.

Not unlike the star, the diamond is a prime example, for Cloud, of a natural form that also serves as a shape, a symbol and a commodity. The last role is explored in the painting *Lesser Evil* (2013), an irregular hexagon suggesting a cut stone. Written where the edges of the facets would be are compound words referring to the mining and selling of the gems to finance war (“blooddiamond,” “diamondgate”). With this exhibition, Cloud revealed the range of significations that can be connected to a single shape as well as the way diverse symbols are constructed from the same geometric material.

—Becky Brown