

Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



Removed Individual, 2013. Oil on canvas with stretcher bars, 10 x 20 feet.

Mike Cloud

Bad Faith and Universal Technique

September 11 – October 25, 2014

Opening reception: Thursday, September 11, 6-8:30 pm

Thomas Erben is very excited to present the gallery's first solo exhibition with painter **Mike Cloud** (b. 1974, Chicago, IL). In a new group of works ranging widely in size, vivid formal aspects combine with an urgent, visceral exploration of history, bringing into conversation the perspective of history's survivors, along with its losers and winners.

Mike Cloud's paintings break out of the format of the medium and take on irregular shapes and sculptural qualities; they invite the viewer into their own creation by sharing the experience of the physical forces involved. Canvas fastened to the front of stretcher bars and then primed creates a tension that makes wood bend under the pull of staples and rabbit-skin glue. Brushes wiped off along the edges of exposed stretchers highlight the connection between raw materials and image. Asymmetrical or multi-cornered stretchers, coarsely conjoined with gaps at the corners, emphasize the 'objectness' of each painting. The creation process is extended into a state where the work remains alive with innate forces.

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Working within his long-developed visual vocabulary, Cloud reexamines historical phenomena and appropriates emotionally loaded symbols. The artist picks apart his subject matter and puts it back together in new configurations – often using painted words as load-bearing elements – collaging his chosen components into an intuitive imprint; an extended process compressed into a single object. Each work becomes a vessel for a certain set of symbols, channeling one particular strain of history.

The multi-panel painting *Removed Individual*, for example, forms two enormous stars of David, one pink and one yellow, referencing the badges used to single out homosexuals and Jews in the Nazi persecutions. Parallel narratives of survival are set forth, reflecting how marginalized groups come to terms with an often painful past. The result is both highly personal and impersonal; particular words are included, in the form of a list surrounded by maze-like representations of hands, feet and genitals, in something resembling an altarpiece. As Cloud forms charged symbols and fractured abstraction into language, we are forced to reevaluate the familiar, while being refused any easy explanations.

After studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Mike 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 was included in *Frequency* at **The Studio Museum in Harlem** in 2006. In addition to numerous reviews, his work was part of *Painting Abstraction* by **Bob Nickas**, Phaidon Press (2009). Cloud is currently an assistant professor at Brooklyn College/CUNY in New York.

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