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ART REVIEWS

New York Galleries: What to See Right Now

Elisabeth Kley and Tabboo!'s botanical beauties; Mike Cloud's "hanging and beheading paintings"; Karl Lagerfeld's sculptural works; and Janine Antoni's symbolic images.



Mike Cloud's "Dorothy Stratton," from 2019, in the exhibition "Tears in abstraction."
Mike Cloud, via Thomas Erben Gallery

Mike Cloud

Through Nov. 9. Thomas Erben, 526 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-645-8701, thomaserben.com.

Abstract painting has been tied, historically, to utopian, spiritual or ecstatic inspirations, but in his show "[Tears in abstraction,](#)" at [Thomas Erben](#), the Chicago artist [Mike Cloud](#) links it to death. He explores a death drive, calling his work the "Hanging and Beheading Paintings" and titling them after people who met untimely ends.

Among the extraordinary assemblages here, fashioned with wooden frames and brown bags from Whole Foods, and festooned with belts and bits of fake fur and leather, are paintings dedicated to the one-time Playboy playmate Dorothy Stratton, the chef and television personality Anthony Bourdain, the Japanese TV idol Miyu Uehara and a Chilean murder victim, María José Reyes. Mr. Cloud scribbles the addresses of informational websites along the frames and adds thick impasto brush strokes as well as his signature, inserted on a piece of cardboard.

The paradox is that Mr. Cloud's paintings are so captivating and inventive that they feel anything but morbid. He transgresses all sorts of formal boundaries, binding together cheap materials with craft and precision. The paintings might serve as memorials and reminders of horrific events — or, as Mr. Cloud says in the gallery's news release, how "we hurt the Other, the Opposite Number, the Opposition." But these vigorous, rigorous works virtually and metaphorically raise the dead.

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