

Thomas Erben Gallery



S of B, 2016. Oil on linen and stretcher bars, 100 x 80 x 5 in.



L of L, 2016. Oil on linen and stretcher bars, 93 x 80 x 5 in.

Mike Cloud – Art Basel Miami Beach

Positions

December 1 – 4, 2016

Thomas Erben Gallery is excited to announce its participation in the Positions section of **Art Basel Miami Beach** with a presentation of Brooklyn-based painter **Mike Cloud**. The booth features new painted constructions and works on paper that address painting's entangled relationship with death, particularly with death by hanging. Cloud's paintings are each balanced on one corner, partly suspended from the wall by a leather belt, evoking individuals who have died by hanging, whether by committing suicide, as murder staged as suicide, or by auto-erotic asphyxiation.

In Mike Cloud's paintings, store-bought stretcher bars are assembled into irregular, multi-layered structures into which the artist glues and staples canvas. By stretching the cloth into these shapes, Cloud creates a fractured surface that ruptures the conventional pictorial space. As the title of the series, *Death by Hanging* refers to individuals who have died in this manner, a motif that is reflected in the names drawn on collaged strips of paper. While the works point towards specific suicides, they also suggest that all paintings relate to death, in that paintings occupy the sacred space of the wall – a space where nothing lives. This uncanny affiliation is represented in popular culture in murder mysteries and

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paranormal contexts, where the eyes of a painting may be seen to move; or, in painting's relationship with mirrors, portals to an ethereal realm that are covered after a death.

In their layers of stretchers held tense by rabbit-skin glue and stapled cloth, the sculptural works depict a range of vibrant symbols and gestures, framed by dabs of excess paint wiped from brushes onto the bars. Cloud's works do not produce an illusory image over a concealed support, but rather present their materials as recognizable – emphasizing their trade value and the literal cost of materials. In summoning their origin rather than their potential, the paintings deny any aspiration to be priceless, instead presenting their materials as commodities. In upending these conventions, the space behind the painting is turned outwards. Rather than producing an imaginary political space, Cloud's paintings pull away from the wall, intruding into our own space.

While Cloud employs a wide variety of mark-making and symbols, the work *S of B* is covered in repeated cube and cloud-like motifs. Painted in predominantly yellow and ochre hues, the forms are executed in a wet-on-wet technique. They cannot be singled out or counted, and are partly lost as they blend into one another. The hazy clouds appear as if concealing something – whether light, or enlightenment, or God is unclear. In another work, *F of J*, soft marks suggesting fireworks or explosions spread across the surface, each constrained within its own small panel. These isolated spaces contain their own gestures and their own shifting colors. In playing with the pigment, Cloud infuses his abstract elements with a spirited vivacity.

Included within the presentation are three smaller works on paper. In each of these collaged works, Cloud dissects a single page from a photographic monograph, one each of Mapplethorpe, Hamilton, and Kern. The depicted forms are broken apart, and the text from the pages is scrambled. In realigning the contents of each page, Cloud does not produce a new image. Rather, he breaks apart their structure, making their content legible in a new way. This understanding of collage aligns with Cloud's analytic approach to painting that, when combined with his interest in social conditions and history, thrusts his work into the broader political sphere.

After studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Mike Cloud earned his MFA from **Yale University** 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. Cloud has been reviewed in the **New York Times, Art in America, Art Review**, and was named one of **Time Out's 10 artists every art fan should know about**. 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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