

Thomas Erben Gallery

MIKE CLOUD

INDEPENDENT 2015

4th Floor

548 West 22nd Street
New York, NY 10011

Preview:

Thursday, March 5

12 - 6 pm Private Viewing

6 - 8 pm Vernissage

Public:

Friday, March 6: 12 - 7 pm

Saturday, March 7: 12 - 7 pm

Sunday, March 8: 12 - 6 pm



MIKE CLOUD

Cycle and Stable

2015

oil on canvas and wood

100 x 106 in

254 x 269.2 cm



MIKE CLOUD

Dick Cheney Paper Quilt (front)

2010

altered photography book, Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint (double-sided)

60 x 67 in / 152.4h x 170.18w cm



MIKE CLOUD

Dick Cheney Paper Quilt (detail)

2010

altered photography book, Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint (double-sided)

60 x 67 in / 152.4h x 170.18w cm



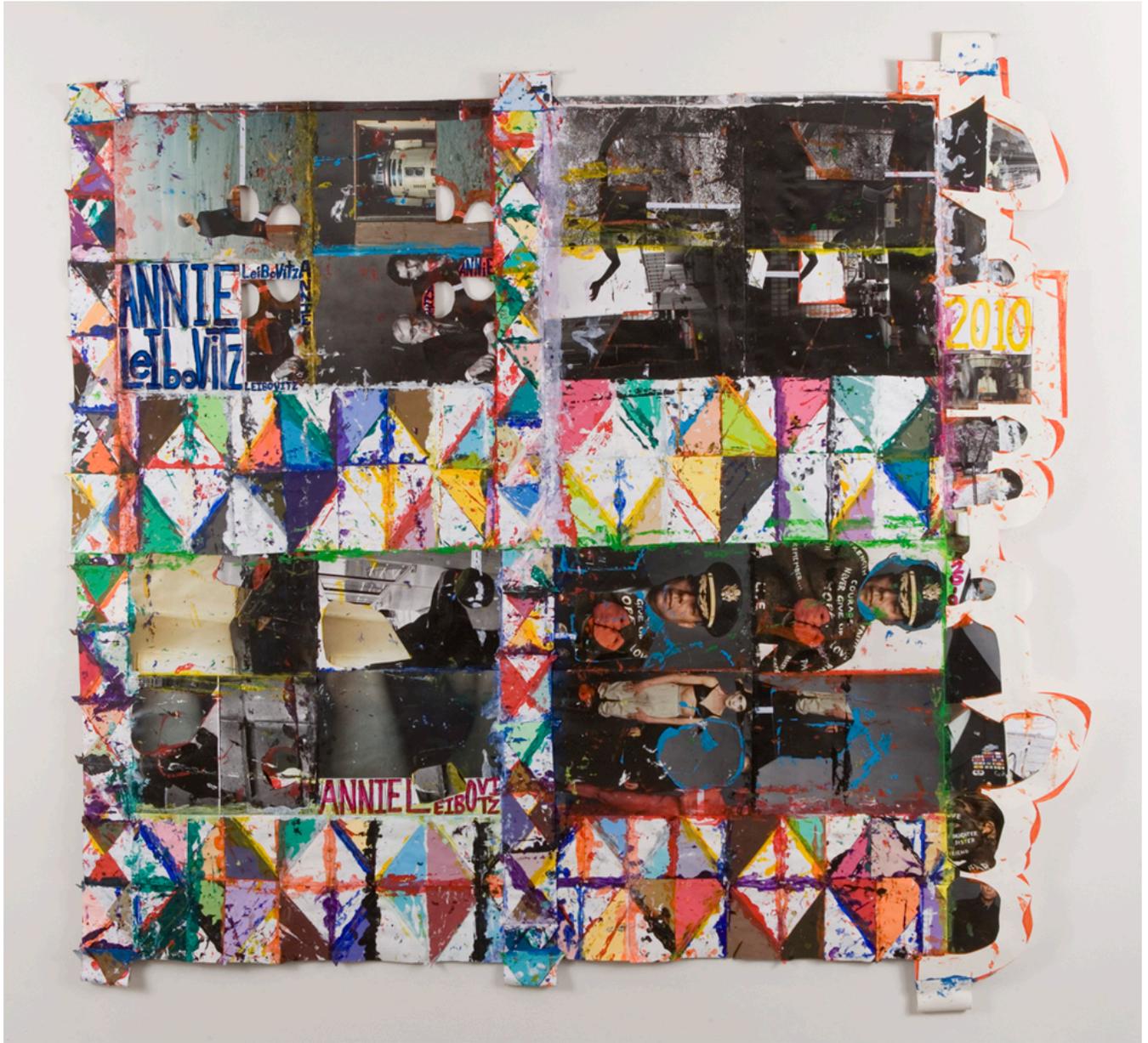
MIKE CLOUD

White Stripes Paper Quilt (installation view)

2010

altered photography book, Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint

60 x 67 in / 152.4h x 170.2w cm



MIKE CLOUD

Colin Powell Paper Quilt (front)

2010

altered photography book, Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint (double-sided)

60 x 67 in / 152.4h x 170.2w cm

MIKE CLOUD

Artist Statement:

What are the conditions of painting's contemporary life among countless reproductions, symbols and descriptions of reality? What is the extent of painting's ability to render other objects aesthetic even as those objects translate painting into words?

A maze is a picture with an entrance and an exit, with a start and a finish that unfold over time like a story. I can read symbols as part of a picture language like the parts of a rebus or use semiotics to translate pictures into cultural meaning. When I respond formally to a work of art I don't have to "read" it. Language, on the other hand, has to read and is not transparent.

I make objects that are very dimensional, not always frontal, and sometimes incorporate very familiar imagery. In spite of my use of depth and imagery, I am very interested in how abstraction and painting function. I don't think that contemporary objects tend to function through formal philosophies. Maybe, to some degree, line, color and shape act directly on psychology, through what is called "significant form". Perhaps diagonal lines appear active by analogy to falling and horizontal ones appear restful by analogy to sleeping. Perhaps red appears agitating by analogy to fire and blue calming by analogy to the water. But bodily experience is not central to contemporary language and contrast is as important a reference point as analogy.

Paintings are always objects within a system of objects, and my paintings create a kind of microcosmic system of objects (toys, mazes, symbols and painting materials), which although familiar within their own contexts, might combine into an overarching system of familiarities that create a kind of transparency of their own.

Bio:

Mike Cloud is a painter living and working in Brooklyn, New York. He earned his M.F.A. from Yale University School of Art and his B.F.A. from the University of Illinois-Chicago. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at P.S.1, NY; the Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Slovak Republic; Honor Fraser Gallery, CA; Thomas Erben Gallery, NY; Good Children Gallery, LA; Marianne Boesky Gallery, NY; White Columns, NY; Max Protetch, NY; Apexart, NYC. Cloud has been reviewed in the New York Times, Art in America, Art Review and featured in the publication *Painting Abstraction* by Bob Nickas, published by Phaidon Press. His awards include the inaugural Chiaro Award from the Headlands Center for the Arts, the Barry Schactman Prize in Painting from the Yale University School of Art as well as the Grace Holt Memorial Award in African American Issues from the University of Illinois, Chicago. His work is held in private and public collections including the The Bronx Museum, Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Cloud has lectured extensively on his work and contemporary theoretical art issues at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, Yale University, Cooper Union, Bard College, Kansas City Art Institute and the University of New Orleans. He is currently an assistant professor at Brooklyn College/ CUNY in New York.



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

MIKE CLOUD

Bad Faith and Universal Technique

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 its 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 canvases 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. – *William Corwin*