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ART IN REVIEW; Mike Cloud

By GRACE GLUECK

Max Protech Gallery
511 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through Oct. 2

Mike Cloud's abstract paintings come in two series. In one group, he lays down expressive, gestural abstractions in orthodox New York School manner, then covers them over with silver foil so that only bits of the imagery show through. In some, small shapes cut from colored paper are fixed on top of the foil, so that flickering tones play on the silvery surface. There's added vitality in the restless squiggles of pigment that can be read underneath the covering.

The most arresting is "Vertical Zig Zag," in which a painting in brick red, blue, black and chocolate hues can be tantalizingly glimpsed behind broad, bent silver stripes that march rhythmically across the canvas.

In the other, more rationally based group, Mr. Cloud uses an algorithmic or programmed approach to characterize the physical qualities of his paint medium, like toxicity, drying speed and paint film quality. Expressed in thickly impastoed, concentric circle charts partly filled with graded colors, they bear titles like "Mild and Moderately Toxic," "Mildly, Moderately and Severely Toxic," etc. Their echoes of unorthodox "system" painters like Al Jensen are apparent. In contrast to Mr. Cloud's other paintings, these rank as mildly to moderately but not severely interesting.

More compelling are his collages, odd and amusing juxtapositions of figures and faces cut from books of photographs by Diane Arbus, Annie Leibovitz and others. In one, titled "Brooklyn Jewish Girl With a Mexican Friend," the porkpie-hatted head and shirtfront of a powerful-looking black man relates to an unattached hand that rests on the d?llet?hest of a wistfully defiant-looking woman; in "Heidi Fleiss," a tribute to the self-declared madam, a decorous woman's head rests atop a lush nude body (with multiple breasts) that overflows the chair she sits in.

Buzzing with ideas, Mr. Cloud is a talent to watch. GRACE GLUECK