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# Bad Faith and Universal Technique

## Mike Cloud at Thomas Erben Gallery, NYC

Diana McClure



(Enlarge Image)

Mike Cloud, *Traveling Barricade* (back), 2013, o/c, 80x49

Mike Cloud has not been seduced by conceptual art. That is not to say there is not a conceptual framework to his aesthetic. It appears that he has taken a most challenging approach to his creative instinct, engaging the intersection of concept and emotion to animate ideas in his work.

The first idea one encounters at the entrance to Mike Cloud's exhibition *Bad Faith and Universal Technique* is *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite*, the rallying cry of the French Revolution. These words, part of the sculpture *Traveling Barricade*, are painted in white, blue and red and are encased in a small triangle on the floor that could easily be overlooked. Above it a torn piece of natural canvas with a slash of white paint across it hangs like a flag of surrender. Perhaps a comment on what it takes to convince another of an idea?

The clashing or the integration of ideas is encountered once again in the painting *Paper Elysium*, which houses a left leaning Confederate flag, pyramids, and trees. Triangles, in the form of shapes, pyramids and stars, are a leitmotif throughout the exhibition. The triangle may speak to concepts of the trine, the harmonious flow of energy that is a potential aspect of all human relations, as in the successful sharing and integration of an idea.

Cloud's material exposure of stretched canvas and stretching bars, his intentionally unpolished presentation and the feeling of organized chaos generated by his paintings, suggest a controlled experiment. What happens when disparate ideas come together within a framework, literally?

His work has an aspect reminiscent of the unpolished flamboyance of William Pope.L's artwork (see Pope.L reference image below). But close viewing of Cloud's art reveals an extremely conscious engagement with imperfection and structure. This is not work of a rebellious nature. It appears to be a sincere investigation of the static nature of ideas in relation to the rich inner lives of individuals.

Color scales and color theory are at work throughout the exhibition in cool palettes, arrangements that flow, and ones that clash. The weight or force of Cloud's curiosity reveals itself through thick paint applied in arduous layers suggesting the unresolved

nature of multiple trains of thought laid out on canvas and paper. Color in this context, as seen in the painting *Untitled (Goddammit Cloud)*, seems to suggest it is in use as a tool to mark variations in thought as opposed to beauty or mood.



(Enlarge Image)

Mike Cloud, *Removed Individual*, 2013, oil/c, 10x20'

The body, alive and as a corpse, reverberates through form and shape throughout Cloud's work. Handprints, footprints, heart prints, and male anatomy are featured in the triangles that form a red-pink and a yellow-brown six-pointed star in the piece *Removed Individual*. This nod to touch, feeling and desire, is accompanied by a rainbow colored flag that hangs from the bottom right of the piece. As a whole this work seems to reference ideas of femininity through its use of yellow and pink, Jewish culture through its use of six-pointed stars, and LGBT politics through its reference to a rainbow flag.

The wood frames that enclose unusually shaped canvases throughout the exhibition seem to encourage viewers to think outside the box in new shapes, new frameworks, and new concepts.



(Enlarge Image)

Detail, *Traveling Barricade*



(Enlarge Image)

Mike Cloud, *Untitled (Goddammit Cloud)*, 2013



(Enlarge Image)



The painting *Dialogue of Growth* resembles the shape of a coffin, stands on the floor and leans on the wall. Handprints in blue and green cover the canvas, images of diamonds are repeated and the word "organ" is painted twice in yellow where the head and the heart would lie in a coffin. The word "organ" placed at the heart center of the coffin is part of a gold link chain. This work of all the works in the exhibition seems the most succinct. It appears to coolly scream at both the suffocating idea and reality of what it means to be a black man in 2014.

Mike Cloud, *Dialog of Growth*, 2014, o/c, 91.5x30.5



(Enlarge Image)

Mike Cloud, *Dick Cheney Paper Quilt*, 2010, altered photography book, Color-Aid paper & acrylic paint, 60x67

*Mike Cloud: Bad Faith and Universal Technique* at Thomas Erben Gallery in New York City is on view through October 25, 2014.

All Mike Cloud images: Courtesy Thomas Erben Gallery.

**Diana McClure** is an art writer based in New York City. She has written for the *NYTimes.com*, *Art Asia Pacific*, *VIBE* magazine, Friedman Benda gallery and the Emilio Sanchez Foundation among others.



(Enlarge Image)

Reference image: William Pope.L's *eRacism*, 2003, at Allied Works Architecture's Portland Institute of Contemporary Art via [m11instalacionunarte](#)



(Enlarge Image)

Artist Mike Cloud. Photo: Thomas Erben Gallery