

# SEANKELLY

Valentine, Victoria L. “Hugo McCloud’s New Paintings are Made with Single-Use Plastic Bags: ‘This Material Could Be Used as Art, But Also as a Tool to Open Up Conversation.’” *Culture Type*. February 26, 2021.



HUGO MCCLLOUD, “with all your might,” 2020 (single use plastic mounted on panel, painting: 55 x 84 inches / 139.7 x 213.4 cm; framed: 56 1/2 x 85 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches / 143.5 x 217.2 x 5.4 cm). | © Hugo McCloud, Courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery

THE WORK OF **Hugo McCloud** has shifted profoundly over the past year. His latest paintings on view at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York, were produced using single-use plastic bags—plentiful, overlooked, non-biodegradable material available in a spectrum of colors. The plastic served as his “paint.” The works are composed of hundreds, or maybe even thousands, of pieces cut out from the bags, layered and mounted on a panel, and fused into place using an iron. McCloud sourced the material from India, Africa, and directly from manufacturers.

“It just was like this material that I found to be accessible, also in a sense of understanding this material and doing ample research on it, you start to see all the environmental impacts. You start to see conversations, the arguments back and forth from both sides and it just became this thing, this material that could be

*Last updated: 2 March 2021*

# SEANKELLY

used as art, but also a tool to open up conversation,” McCloud said in a conversation with Sean Kelly.

“I think that’s really my objective with the material, to open up a sense of dialogue to things that normally wouldn’t be part of our daily life, but that would bring light to it, understanding, and visibility.”

*“I think that’s really my objective with the material, to open up a sense of dialogue to things that normally wouldn’t be part of our daily life, but that would bring light to it, understanding, and visibility.” — Hugo McCloud*

“Hugo McCloud: Burdened” features mostly figurative images. The paintings depict individuals on foot collecting refuse and others using bicycles to transport fruit and other goods; women hunched over, hauling hefty bundles on their backs across the Moroccan border into Spain; and Libyan refugees packed onto overcrowded rafts adrift in the Mediterranean Sea. The works speak to labor, the environment, the human condition, geopolitics, and the physical burden of economic inequality.

McCloud is known for working with scrap metal and tar paper. His previous solo show at the gallery was titled “Metal Paintings,” an apt description of the abstract works composed of bronze sheets with soldered, torched, and chemically patinated surfaces.



HUGO MC CLOUD, “pineapple express,” 2020 (single use plastic mounted on panel, painting: 70 x 60 inches / 177.8 x 152.4 cm; framed: 71 1/2 x 61 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches / 181.6 x 156.2 x 5.4 cm). | © Hugo McCloud, Courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery

Aesthetically, the plastic paintings are a marked departure from the artist’s earlier work. Conceptually, the new direction is a natural extension of what he has been

*Last updated: 2 March 2021*

# SEANKELLY

doing all along—finding beauty in the overlooked and working with industrial materials that are “discarded, disregarded, and devalued.”

McCloud splits his time between Brooklyn, N.Y., and Tulum, Mexico, where he was in isolation during the pandemic making the new works. McCloud wrote a brief essay about his plastic paintings and explained why he was drawn to his latest material and its significance in the world and his work.

“Beginning with my first trip to South Africa around 2002, where I spent time in a shanty town, to my travels in India, South East Asia, and Latin America, as well as most of the impoverished industrial neighborhoods that I’ve inhabited over the last 18 years as a working artist, I have continually been attracted to the process of waste management, the process of downcycling, and the people that are involved in these processes as an act of survival and livelihood. We as a human race, myself included, have acted irresponsibly with our earth and the environment,” McCloud said.

“My investigation into plastic started about 5 years ago after traveling to India. I saw multi-color polypropylene plastic sacks everywhere and started to understand the downcycle of these sacks, starting with the companies that originally purchased them and used them for the distribution of their products, on down to the trash pickers in Dharavi slums. The idea that these plastic bags would always be around due to their material that would never biodegrade interested me, as did the hands and lives of the many people they would pass through.” **CT**

**“Hugo McCloud: Burdened” is on view at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, N.Y., from Jan. 22-Feb. 27, 2021**

*Last updated: 2 March 2021*