

Lucien, Lyne. "Meet Hugo McCloud, the Artist Who Makes Metal Beautiful," *Daily Beast*, March 23, 2018.



Meet Hugo McCloud, the Artist Who Makes Metal Beautiful

Hugo McCloud creates stunning pieces from traditionally overlooked materials, while resisting the art world's tendency to pigeonhole him as a 'black artist.'



It's not every day the neighborhood plumber walks into a café and casually offers to acquire lead for the owner of the joint. At AP Café in Bushwick, such a gesture is the norm for metal painter and cafe owner Hugo McCloud, who prides himself on fully immersing within his community.

McCloud never shies away from a conversation with anyone who enters his minimally decorated space. In fact, these daily community interactions are a major inspiration for his art. He believes in finding beauty in the ordinary.

McCloud is not your typical self-taught contemporary artist. He bases his art on day-to-day experiences, his travels, and life lessons rather than just on the relationship between patterns within a frame.

McCloud's latest project, *Metal Paintings*, rejects art world stereotyping altogether and instead tells the story of his journey to find beauty in overlooked spaces and materials.

Metal painting was McCloud's first medium, where he collected scrap metals and experimented with patinas and chemical oxidation techniques.

After nine years of working as an artist and having these techniques nearly perfected, McCloud decided it was time to go back to his roots.

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LYNE LUCIEN/THE DAILY BEAST

Fittingly, McCloud transformed a former steel factory, next door from his cafe and former fabrication workspace, into a gallery for his show. The raw space retains the industrial feel with unpainted concrete floors and tin-covered walls. The new gallery is where he'll deliver a talk in partnership with Sean Kelly Gallery's Director, Jeffrey Grove, on March 24th.

At its surface, his art reads as abstract, McCloud engaging with a variety of metals and chemical oxidation methods. But when you look closer, his patterns contain traces of his views on life. McCloud's pieces aren't overtly political. "It's all buried in the subtext," he said.

When he noticed that the city never picked up old discarded furniture in the projects of his neighborhood, he started taking pictures of the flower patterns of old mattresses and chairs.

He used a block printing technique, learned in India, to stamp the flower patterns onto his painting of couture gowns. "I was taking dresses that you associate with elitism and overlapping them with something associated with poverty and trash to make something that now is considered beautiful," explained McCloud.



HUGO MCCLLOUD/SEAN KELLY GALLERY

Golden Wings Fly Low, 2016, Aluminum, liquid tar, oil paint on tar paper

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Of course, embedding social issues below the surface of an abstract art piece and hoping that people understand it is a worthy idea in theory, but do people care to ask about its production and meaning?

McCloud conceded that “no one cares to have these conversations. I’ve given up on trying to force-feed the message. The problem is that I am a black artist, but I am not an artist painting ‘black’ subject-matter. If I was painting a deliberate in your face black subject matter, there would be a lot more attention towards that. The underlying day to day things that we as people actually deal with is what I deal with in art. I am using a creative way of doing that.”

When it comes to the fine art world, being a black artist comes with a set of expectations from museums, galleries and buyers. “Black art” is often contextualized within the frame of race simply because the artist is black.

“I feel like everybody is in the sunken place,” said McCloud, a reference to a key scene in Jordan Peele’s acclaimed movie *Get Out*; for McCloud the phrase extends to meaning how disconnected and linear-thinking art world chiefs are when it comes to diversity.

“My gallery told me that museum curators say that unless you are having a political, racial, or sexual rights conversation then they are not really interested in your work,” he said. “Why can Damien Hirst paint flowers because it’s just what he wanted to paint? If I do a whole show of flowers, there’s no impact because we’ve been pigeonholed into only having conversations about one area: race.”

McCloud may face the same pressures as any black artist, but he won’t conform to expectations in order to attain more visibility in the art world.

Hugo McCloud will discuss his project, Metal Paintings, at Sean Kelly Gallery's temporary space, 420b Troutman Street in Bushwick, Brooklyn, on March 24 at 2 p.m.



Separated Values, 2017, patina, oil stick, solder on solid bronze sheet, mounted on aluminum frame.

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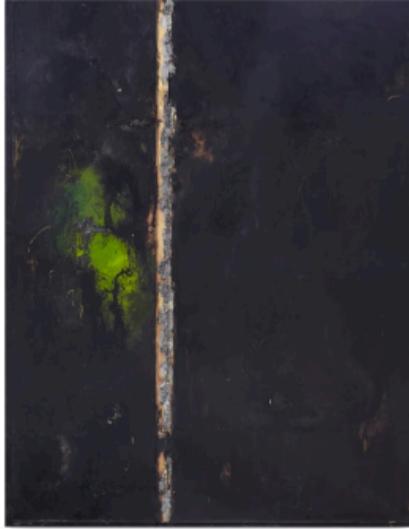


Dividing lines, 2017, patina, oil stick, solder on solid bronze sheet, mounted on aluminum frame.

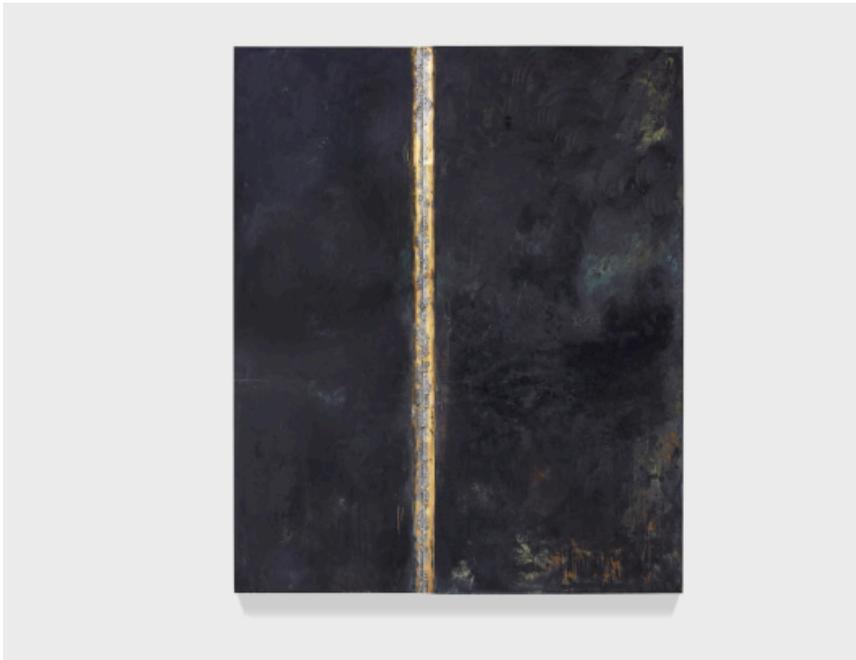


Watered down, 2017, patina, oil stick, solder on solid bronze sheet, mounted on aluminum frame.

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Lotus, 2017, patina, oil stick, solder on solid bronze sheet, mounted on aluminum frame.



Held Apart, 2017, patina, oil stick, solder on solid bronze sheet, mounted on aluminum frame.

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Single Moments, 2017, patina, oil stick, solder on solid bronze sheet, mounted on aluminum frame.