



HUGO McCLOUD

BURDENED

JANUARY 22 – FEBRUARY 27, 2021

Sean Kelly Gallery is delighted to announce *Burdened*, Hugo McCloud's third solo exhibition with the gallery. The works in the exhibition—created over the last nine months whilst McCloud quarantined at his studio in Mexico—are composed entirely of the ubiquitous, but overlooked material, single use plastic bags. Another distinguishing element of this new body of work is that it marks McCloud's first foray into figuration. Occupying all three galleries, this exhibition addresses the human and economic cost of labor worldwide, geopolitics, the environmental impact of single use plastic and McCloud's preoccupation with finding beauty in the everyday.

Hugo McCloud is well known for his abstract paintings which utilize materials often omitted from fine art practices – tar paper, scrap metal, solder, and industrial materials – things the artist refers to as “discarded, disregarded and devalued.” Continuing his interest in working with overlooked materials, this new series is meticulously composed using hundreds, even thousands, of small cut-out pieces of single use plastic, collaged to create the compositions. Using plastic bags as the “paint” that comprises his palette, McCloud carefully constructs the images building layers from varied hues of plastic to achieve the desired result.

McCloud uses plastic as a metaphor to understand our similarities and differences as human beings; to connect to our environment; and to highlight the negative impact on our shared planet of our carbon footprint. He addresses the economics of labor through the medium of plastic and how it passes through the hands of individuals at every level of society. Through his process of recycling materials in these works, McCloud questions the politics of down-cycling and its impact upon inequality, migration and the resources available to each of us. Originally drawing inspiration from photographs of people he encountered during his travels, when Covid-19 travel restrictions were put in place McCloud was forced to pivot and source images from the internet.

McCloud's paintings in the main gallery focus on workers performing their daily tasks. His subjects, their gaze concealed or averted, are engaged in labor critical to their survival, whether it be collecting refuse, transporting fruit and other goods, or recycling oil. He states that this new body of work is "about the idea of the person that is burdened in life, trying to survive, or make ends meet. I think in some regards, everybody is burdened in their own way in life." In the front gallery, McCloud depicts images referencing the Mediterranean refugee crisis, migrants adrift at sea, attempting to make the perilous journey to another country to escape the unbearable conditions in their homeland—risking their lives in the hope of a better future for them and their families. In the lower gallery, McCloud exhibits a series of intimate, elegiac images of plants and flowers that he refers to as his "quarantine drawings." He notes that as the lockdown continued, we were all bombarded with negative news and as our movements were increasingly restricted, it was important for him to "find a moment in each day for something that was in a sense still beautiful and still light."

In June 2021 McCloud's work will be the subject of a major exhibition at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Within the past year, his work has been acquired by the Brooklyn Museum, New York and the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, North Carolina. His work is in the collections of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.; the North Carolina Museum of Art; the Detroit Institute of the Arts; and The Margulies Collection, Miami. McCloud has been the subject of solo exhibitions at The Arts Club, London and Fondazione 107, in Turin, Italy. He has also been featured in group exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York and The Drawing Center, New York, amongst others.

For additional information on Hugo McCloud please visit skny.com

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Image Caption: Hugo McCloud, *Pineapple Express*, 2020, single use plastic mounted on panel, 71 x 61 inches (180.3 x 154.9 cm) © Hugo McCloud Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York