

SEANKELLY

Editor. "LVH Art in Conversation with Artist Hugo McCloud." *LVH Art*. February 27, 2021.

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Born in Palo Alto California in 1980, Hugo McCloud is one of the rising stars of the New York art scene today. A self-taught artist, his practice is influenced by his background in industrial design, and hence unrestricted by academic tenets. By fusing unconventional industrial materials such as metal, bronze or tar paper, McCloud creates his vibrant large scale paintings, which stem from the artist's travels around the world and the cultures he has encountered along the way.

His newest body of work touches on notions of class particularly through his use of plastic bags, continuing his practice of incorporating industrial materials using plastic as a tool to unite people and better understand our similarities and differences as a human race; to connect our environment; and to contribute to reversing the negative impact of our carbon footprint.

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Photo by Matt Buchwach. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly New York.

LVH: You have a background in industrial design, how has this upbringing influenced your practice as an artist? Did your early paintings bounce off design ideas?

HM: My journey as a designer started off because my mother had an interior design store in California where she sold fountains. Having dropped out of business school, I started helping her at the store, and years later I found myself with my own full fabrication shop, designing and manufacturing furniture for residential and commercial properties. During those very successful years, I learnt and trained myself in furniture design, and I developed a strong knowledge on wood, metal, bronze and stone work. As a designer /fabricator that deals with various materials you tend to have a lot more to pull from. When you understand materials and tools you can then manipulate them from their original purpose, and everything I do now as an artist stems out of that awareness and practice.

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Installation view of Hugo McCloud: Metal Paintings at Sean Kelly BK. March 2018. Photography: JSP Art Photography. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York.

LVH: When did you know that it was time to step away from industrial design and into painting?

HM: The trigger to becoming an artist was very much a "click". I had the opportunity of turning my design store into a very serious business as my projects were getting larger and larger. The issue was that with time I found myself becoming a manager but really hands off in the actual fabrication and the artisan aspect of the business, and I knew that what I actually wanted to do was creating, so I decided that I wanted to find my avenue in fine art where I continually have the ability to evolve my own creativity without being tight to any sort of guidelines.

My first paintings grew out of a trip to South Africa in 2003, when I got to see the Shendeti houses for the first time. I was fascinated by their architecture, and so with all the scrap materials I had from my design projects, I started making my first Metal Paintings, which are an abstraction of the walls of the Shendeti houses. For a few years I split my time between working on my design projects and dabbling in fine art, and in 2009 I decided that it was to move to New York and pursue my artistic career seriously.

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*Installation view of Hugo McCloud: Veiled at Sean Kelly, New York. December - January 2017.
Photography: Jason Wyche, New York. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York.*

LVH: How would you describe the relationship between you and the materials you use? and what is it that you are trying to address through its use?

HM: All of my stuff is material based, I like the idea of finding beauty in the things that are overlooked, or the things not commonly found beautiful. So that is another reason for me to use the materials that I use. With whatever material I choose to employ, I always question: how do I take this common material that is not really created to produce art, but is more so created for some sort of human necessity and manipulate it, and what are the possibilities of this material? I look at the material as a tool. But I honestly don't know where it will lead until I actually start creating with it.

"I like the idea of finding beauty in the things that are overlooked, or the things not commonly found beautiful."- Hugo McCloud.

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Metal Painting (detail), 2018. Courtesy of Sean Kelly.

LVH: I have read that you travel a lot. How have your trips inspired you to create new bodies of work?

HM: Before the pandemic I used to travel a lot and create from the visuals around me. I love visiting different regions and immersing myself in their culture. I don't want to pick up patterns that I have no relation to, and so I get involved and work closely with their people and communities. Traveling to me is the biggest form of education and inspiration. I simply like to see how things are done in different cultures.

The paintings in my last show *Burdened* at Sean Kelly were all created in my studio in Tulum, where I have been spending the lockdown. With Covid-19 travel

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restrictions, I was forced to pivot and source images from the internet, drawing inspiration from photographs of people performing their daily tasks and engaged in labor critical to their survival, whether it be collecting refuse, transporting fruit and other goods, or recycling oil. My desire in this new body of work is to address the economics of labor through the medium of plastic and how it passes through the hands of individuals at every level of society.

"Traveling to me is the biggest form of education and inspiration."- Hugo McCloud.



Hugo McCloud, "with all your might," 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly New York.

LVH: When talking about artistic inspirations, which artists speak to your heart the most?

HM: When I started my fine art career I was mainly drawn to the Arte Povera movement, simply because I had a profound awareness and comprehension of what those artists were doing due to my design background. Jannis Kounellis

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was perhaps my main inspiration. Nowadays, I am very fond of the work of Leonardo Drew and Mark Bradford.



Hugo McCloud, "Come and Go," 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly New York.

LVH: I have heard you say before that all of your work is kind of process oriented. Could you walk us through this process?

HM: I begin by deciding on the subject matter, the topic that I want to discuss and the conversation that I am trying to have with the audience. Then I choose a photograph which encapsulates what I intend to portray, either from my travels, or sourced from the internet. Once I select that image, I do all sorts of editing using photoshop and other computer programs, and once it is ready, I project it into the panels, which I use instead of canvases. I often do some more alterations by hand, and once the outline is ready, I choose the colours, the materials and the layers and prepare them. And once everything is ready it becomes almost like, you paint by number, following the plan and the outline.

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*Installation view of Hugo McCloud: Burdened at Sean Kelly, New York. January – February, 2021.
Photography: Jason Wyche, New York Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York.*

LVH: The paintings in your show at Sean Kelly are quite figurative, in contrast to your previous work which was much more abstract. Could you tell us more about this new body of work and how does it relate to your previous, more abstract ones?

HM: I've been developing the same themes for years, working with industrial materials to suggest situations. But one aspect of my work has clearly changed since the move—my use of colour and my turn to figuration. I am connecting the dots in a way that not everybody would understand unless they actually take full interest and time in understanding the meaning of all the other different bodies of work but I am still using a material to manipulate, to make art. But now I am taking the abstraction out of the picture, before I was looking at different environments, situations and images and abstracting them and then making either the Stamp paintings or the Metal paintings, so the reference that I had outside of the studio were these kind of global situations or environments that I had experienced through my travels. And with my new body of work, the plastic paintings, what they really are is me being impatient for people to understand what the abstraction work is about. I really love abstract work because it gives you the freedom to create whatever you want to create. What I am doing now is more so you see exactly what I am creating, it is figurative.

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I created this show which is a very literal representation of what my abstractions are about, but what I really am trying to do is to have a link between both. I really want to continue to develop my abstract language and have a balance between my figurative work and my abstract work. I want to continue my creative research, I look at the success of being an artist as the freedom to continually put yourself in environments that are unfamiliar, and develop your own take on.

"I look at the success of being an artist as the freedom to continually put yourself in environments that are unfamiliar, and develop your own take on." - Hugo McCloud.



*Installation view of Hugo McCloud: Burdened at Sean Kelly, New York. January – February, 2021.
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