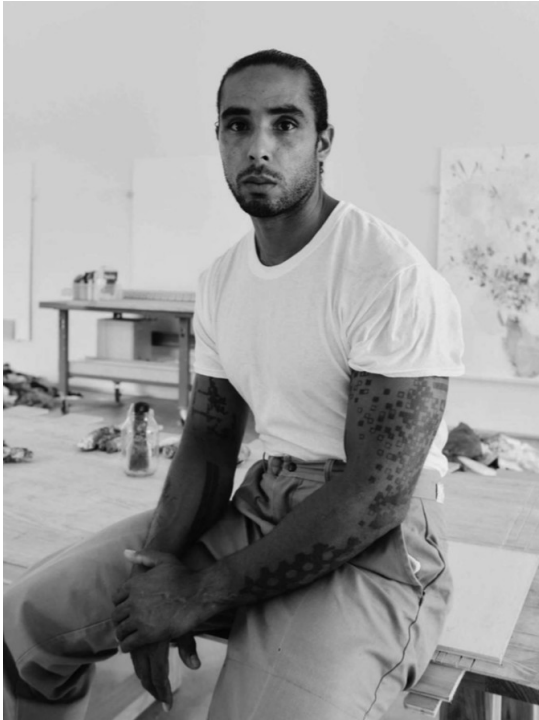


SEANKELLY

Valluzzo, Andrea. "Painting with plastic: Artist builds his paintings with experimental mediums in Aldrich show." *The Ridgefield Press*. June 17, 2021.

THE RIDGEFIELD PRESS



In his first solo museum exhibition at Ridgefield's Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, "Hugo McCloud: from where i stand," the artist explores a material not typically associated with art. McCloud, who works in Brooklyn, N.Y., and Mexico, has traveled extensively around the world. He finds artistic inspiration and beauty in plastic, a material overlooked yet ubiquitous, all the while having significant impact on global economies and the environment.

The exhibition, featuring work he made over the last seven or eight years, is on view through January 2, 2022.

He has been a tireless experimenter in his work, which is often inspired by the evolution and ultimately, decay, of the urban landscape and his own keen interest in industrial design. A prolific artist, he frequently surveys issues relating to the value of labor, inequities in social and racial economics, and the balance between meaning and beauty. The exhibition title references his belief in being a global citizen who looks at the world from his own point of view.

Plastic is readily available and part of people's everyday lives, so its impact on society and the environment posed concepts McCloud was eager to respond to here.

SEANKELLY

“I think that being able to use it as a tool to open up the lanes of conversation for all sides is interesting,” he said.

Among the conversations he hopes his art will inspire are explorations of society’s values. “Right now I am primarily focused on my idea of what society considers valuable. I am definitely interested in social economics and the economics of different environments around the world, especially social economics of the haves and have nots,” he said.

The inclusion of human figures in his newest body of work also speaks to “the willingness of human beings that are willing to do things that are outright uncomfortable to provide for themselves and for their families. I think that is just a beautiful thing ... in a sense it’s looking at something that is a bit more intense or hard but at the same time trying to and some level of beauty in that or acceptance in that.”

Asked if his use of plastic in his art, which is prevalent in this exhibition, marks a radical departure from his previous work, McCloud instead posits that it is a continuous investigation of what he has done over the last decade, from using unconventional materials such as tar paper and aluminum sheeting. The artist has long found beauty in discarded materials that are not valued but yet have purpose.

Utilizing single-use plastic bags as a way to analyze class issues, trade and commerce, McCloud creates a social context in his works that use these bags as an artistic medium, building them up in artworks. His word choice of “building” his artworks, rather than painting them, is deliberate. It can be likened to an architect’s blueprints, which contain layers that together create a building. Cutting down plastic bag pieces to the desired shape, he fuses them onto a panel and builds up layers to get the right look.

“The plastic material is not forgiving like paint where you can add on layers but also either take away layers or cover up layers by using paint,” he said. “There’s no forgiveness [with plastic] so what you put down is what is going to be there and there is no covering it up. What I mean by ‘building’ is using different colors to create tones, layers, depth of eld and contrast.”

As an artist whose works are mostly non-representational, McCloud has shifted in the last few years to including human figures in his plastic-bag artworks that previously were more abstracted. He bases his figures on photos he has taken on his world travels and the figures allude to class and issues of inequity. Motifs of interest for him were the oft-sighted massive pile of bags on top of motorcycles and bicycles seen in developing countries or the bag-laden shopping carts used by homeless people in New York City.

SEANKELLY

Art is highly subjective and interpretation is in the eye of the beholder, but McCloud hopes audiences walk away with a sense of who he is as an artist and his journey so far.

“I think what separates this kind of show from some other artists’ shows is that if you looked at my earlier work or middle work to the work now, you wouldn’t really think it’s the same artist,” he said. “I think that if you give it time, you start to see all the connecting dots of the different bodies of work and how they do relate. You start to see the use of material and how all it kind of tells a continuous, linear story.”

For more information about McCloud’s show, visit thealdrich.org.