

Curator



MIKE CLOUD AND SAM JABLON

March 2021

A conversation with artists Mike Cloud and Sam Jablon on the occasion of their two-person exhibition, *blurred life time*, at the Landing in Los Angeles.

Interview by Dan Golden

It's great to connect to discuss your new show at the Landing. How did it come together?

Mike Cloud A few years ago, my work was included in a group exhibition at the Landing. I had not spoken to Gerard O'Brien (the owner of the Landing) directly at that point. Still, I knew of the gallery and have followed exhibitions online (ironically, I am following this exhibition online due to the pandemic).

I was very excited when Sam told me (if I remember correctly) that he had mentioned my work in passing to Gerard, who remembered and followed it since that time too. Sam broached the idea of a two-person show, and Gerard turned out to be interested. It is the first major thing I have done in LA.

Sam Jablon Mike and I have talked to each other about what we are both working on for years and have traded works with each other. I always found our conversations inspiring, both when I was studying with him in grad school and after. I became friends with Gerard a few years ago at NADA. His booth was across from Ballon Rouge, who I work with in Brussels. Gerard and I had a long talk about poetry, my work, and also Mike's work. About a year ago, I asked Gerard if he would be interested in doing a show with Mike and me, and he was excited and supportive of the idea.





Can you each talk a bit about your work in this exhibition?

Sam Jablon My work in this exhibition was all made in 2020 and deals with anxiety and time. I've been working on a series of anxiety-based works like "nothing bad happens," "fuck, don't panic," "doomed," "eat disasters," and "time." I wanted the text to relate to what we're all going through. Personally, this past year has been traumatic, with my dad hospitalized for COVID-19 and thankfully recovering, but it's also been an amazing time to focus in the studio. Both those experiences are wrapped up in the work. I wanted the text to be something optimistic but also doomed.

Mike Cloud I was isolated in my home for most of 2020, watching on TV as the public reconsidered which historical figures we ought to commemorate or blame for our current portion of happiness or misery. I watched as people tore down monuments to the wicked "great men" of history and put up memorials to the powerless who might also turn out one day to have been hypocrites or criminals.

I painted a portrait of one of the heroes of the 911 United Airlines flight 93 that included, among other words, "We will never forget! Rest in power..."

even if, heaven forbid, you were an enthusiastic beneficiary of injustice or an unpunished criminal.” Everyone on that flight is a hero to me. To have heroes at all, to face the past, I must have forgiven everyone already. In painting, I deal with symbols that are not flexible enough to represent my own particular suffering's complexity. Forgiveness and sympathy are a big part of that.



“Blurring is about widening and dispersing something beyond recognition. For me, that can be a widening of perspective that blurs the borders of what is possible, or it can refer to the stretching out and distortion of time we are all experiencing in the virtual spaces of the pandemic.”

— Mike Cloud



Gesture and language are shared elements in your work. What draws you each to employing text and physicality?

Mike Cloud I reject the learned complexity I have accumulated over the years to get to an authentic beginning and ending when I paint— I undermine all the material complexity, technical complexity, and complexities of depiction I have stored up. Text is a way to get underneath the complexity inherent in painting depictions of things.

Sam Jablon I started as a poet studying at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. The school was founded by poets Alan Ginsberg and Anne Waldman. Language and poetry have always been at the core of my practice. I like to think of whole shows as nonlinear poems. I make them mirrored or hard to read to really focus on the materiality of paint, color, and texture.

What does the title of the exhibition, *blurred life time*, refer to?

Mike Cloud Blurring is about widening and dispersing something beyond recognition. For me, that can be a widening of perspective that blurs the borders of what is possible, or it can refer to the stretching out and distortion of time we are all experiencing in the virtual spaces of the pandemic.

Sam Jablon I think Mike said that perfectly. Over the course of making this show, the time has sort of lost meaning and blurred, and all we can do is keep moving ahead.

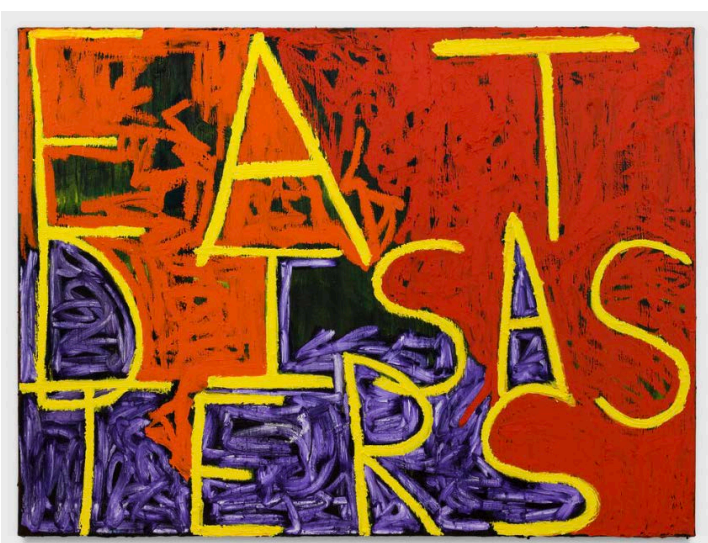
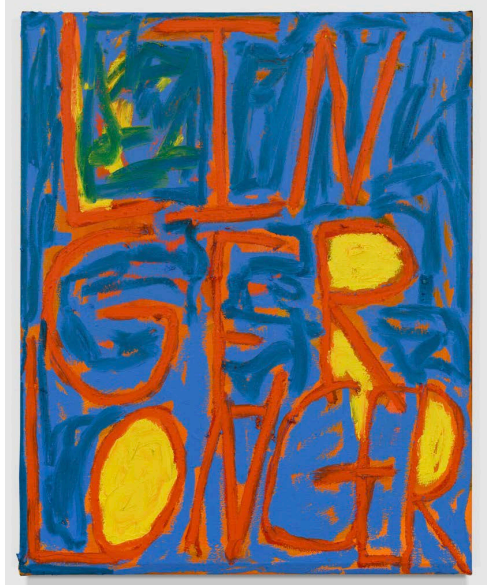
I'm curious to learn how you two first connected.

Sam Jablon I chose to go to Brooklyn College because Mike was teaching there, and they also had artists like Vito Acconci and Archie Rand. I think I took all of Mike's classes.

Mike Cloud Sam was a graduate student of mine at Brooklyn College several years ago. I had an affinity for him as an artist because of his interest in emotion as a tangible subject and his seriousness about abstraction. We also had an affinity at that time due to our particular deployment of collage, text, and painterliness in our work.

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— Sam Jablon





Tell me about how COVID-19 impacted the development of the show.

Mike Cloud I have always enjoyed visiting Sam's studio and seeing his work. We used to live in the same city, but since moving to Chicago, we generally text one another images of works in progress at odd moments. I had conceived of this show as a big studio visit. We didn't watch each other too closely or ask too many questions. I was looking forward to the visceral surprise of seeing his work after a few years. My biggest COVID-19 regret related to this exhibition is not seeing his new work in person. I think we postponed the show for a couple of months, hoping that things in the country would improve, but ultimately I think we wanted to put the show on for people who were close enough to see it.

Sam Jablon Obviously, it is not an ideal time to mount a show, but as Mike said, COVID-19 wasn't in the conversation when we conceived the show. We originally planned the show with the Landing to open during Frieze LA A benefit of showing now is that people have more time to think about art and see the show. I had originally planned to make my portion of the show in LA and spend a few months working. I regret that wasn't possible and that we weren't able to be there for an opening.



Mike Cloud



Sam Jablon. Portrait by Alan Gutierrez

Seeing your work installed together for this show, have you gained any insights into either your own work or the others?

Mike Cloud When I build a painting, I start at the wooden support and end at the painted surface. Sam starts at the surface and projects into the eye in a way that is beautiful and moving. I start at the authentic beginning of my painting process, but Sam always reminds me - both in his work and when we speak to each other - that different painting start and end at very different points along, what I imagine, is the same road.

Sam Jablon I regret not being able to see the show in LA. I always think Mike's work is powerful in person. About a year ago and just days before the pandemic was announced, I saw Mike's work at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and it was probably the last show I saw for months. There is almost a type of poetry to the shapes of his canvases; each tells its own story. This was the first time I've seen our work in the same room together. There are moments where the work really speaks to each other, like the *Hero Portrait of Georgine Carrigan* and my painting *Endlessness* or the works *Hanging Portrait Anthony Bourdain* and my painting *Dead Ends Without Ends*. These moments really surprised me because Mike and I didn't really show each other what we were working on throughout the year.

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blurred life time
The Landing
February 6—March 20, 2021