

TOTAH

Morphologies

Mike Cloud, Odili Donald Odita, Samuel Jablon, Jo Messer, Sam Messer

November 14, 2023 – February 3, 2024

TOTAH presents *Morphologies*, an exhibition of recent works by Mike Cloud, Odili Donald Odita, Sam Jablon, Jo Messer, and Sam Messer. The exhibition presents two works by each artist depicting chaos, structure, architecture, color, and the figure. Morphology is the study of meaning, shape, and form. Each exhibited artist plays off each other and vacillates between directness and subversion. The show revolves around a dialogue and exchange linking artists who create work that employs a dichotomy of structure and significance.

Cloud explores systems of identity, portraiture, and color. By cutting his stretcher bars he destructs the nature of the square painting to create sculptural canvases that range in shape from stars, arrows, flags, coffins, fish, and hexagons. The broken bars are used to build and layer imagery on top of itself creating the form he is depicting. More broadly, his practice questions the identity of what a painting is — at times adding text, URLs, child's toys, and household items such as spoons, shower curtains, and paint.

Odita's abstract paintings challenge the idea of form by creating dynamic structures via sharp intersecting angles and patterns that can visually multiply to no end. His geometric compositions of coded color evoke emotions to convey experience. Shapes turn to landscape and figure, exploding vertically and horizontally. Odita's veneer paintings use complex found manufactured patterns that are then juxtaposed with paint, creating the illusion of depth. The two patterns of the wood and paint vibrate with visual simulation.

Jablon's paintings are characterized by the abstraction of language, visualized through poetic forms. Central to this is an interplay between what is read and what is seen. Works are layered, erased, and labored. The text becomes figure, line, and architecture, at once embracing tension and obliteration. The resulting compositions obstruct linguistic meaning, giving way to new levels of significance that emerge through distortions of letters, words, and syntax. Thickly applied paint in bold colors further serve to disorient, prompting viewers to navigate the surface of the paintings in searching for definition – where perhaps there is none.

Jo Messer's paintings use portraiture to explore abstraction. The work delves into an almost monochromatic color that acts as a veil to obscure figures in a variety of situations from erotic and impulsive, to humorous and unpredictable. Lines become the spiraling atmosphere of a storm moving closer from the horizon. Body parts become shape and gesture that are at times grounded by feet pressing the bottom of the canvas and round toes protruding forward. Her work offers fresh perspectives on how bodies become entangled, smudged, concealed through a shadow-like haziness obscuring their acts.

Sam Messer has repeatedly used the motif of a typewriter to explore the form and paint. In his paintings, the typewriter comes into view through thick paint, bold color and text. Deploying a form of conceptual abstractions in their treatment of still-life subject matter, Messer renders rich, soulful portraits of inanimate subjects. On his canvas, typewriters become humanlike -- eyes, nose, and teeth churning away. Some unleash words like "please" or "fear not," and phrases like "I celebrate myself." Other times, they lose their shape and slide into biomorphic abstraction and color. Messer combines a mixture of eccentricity and absurdity to convey the depth of the human experience in his cumbersome and graceful typewriters.

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