

# Art in America

## Chris Hood

By *Eric Sutphin*  November 17, 2015 3:47pm



Chris Hood: *Untitled (The Exploding Hearts)*, 2015, oil on canvas, 49 by 39¼ inches; at Lyles & King.

The title of this exhibition, “Slow Drag in Margaritaville,” suggested the comic/sardonic register that Chris Hood hits in the suite of paintings on view. For the past four years, the 31-year-old artist has been developing a technique in which he paints his canvases from the reverse side, so that the grounds one sees result from the seepage of the paint through the cotton duck. This method, a throwback to Color Field painting, accounts for the distinctively chalky texture of the compositions.

Two paintings flanked opposite walls at the entrance to the main, sunken gallery. *Untitled (The Exploding Hearts)*—all works 2015—was hung on the right. Laid out against a field of jittery yellow, green and gray marks, Hood’s forms in this work include comic heart-shaped characters (or maybe different iterations of the same character) wearing Mickey Mouse gloves and smoking cigarettes; stylized plumes of smoke; and gourd-type shapes. Diagrammatic, peach-colored lines cut the picture plane up at erratic angles and connect the various elements as though in a narrative sequence. Such lines, serving as a kind of graffiti whereby Hood tags his own work, appear as a recurring self-effacing motif in nearly all the canvases.

The elongated ghostlike figures in *Cimmerian Fever* and *Rank* bear wide, goofy grins and heavy-lidded eyes and seem to shout, “Whoa, man, isn’t this painting trippy?!” This isn’t to say that Hood’s work is made up of one-liners. He melds the offhandedness of high-school notebook marginalia with an engagement with the history of painting since modernism. The composition-spanning lines, for instance, connect his work to that of painters ranging from Jonathan Lasker

to Trudy Benson, who use such elements to similar ends. His figuration recalls Guston and, at other times, Munch, while his swirling polychrome fields are a direct response to van Gogh's landscapes.

Burnout was the most accomplished work in the show. It presents a harmonious mix of cartoon fragments, drawn lines and sgraffito-like textures. Rich mauve, jade and olive marks comprise a tempestuous surface on which six grinning clouds float, with lightning bolts (another recurring motif in Hood's paintings) zigzagging out of them. Pale yellow lines provide a path through the chaotic scene, leading viewers around the canvas at hard angles and then into a trapezoid-shaped circuit that fails to corral a cluster of blue globs.

Despite Hood's evocations of modern and contemporary painting precedents, he has begun to develop his own visual language. He is still early in his career, but his work has matured since the clunky geometric abstraction he exhibited in the 2014 show "Anthropocene" at New York's Canada gallery. His new work is energetic, funny, a little angsty, and, ultimately, endearing.