



# ELEPHANT

THE ART CULTURE MAGAZINE ISSUE 26 SPRING 2016

HOW TO MAKE A DENT  
IN THE UNIVERSE



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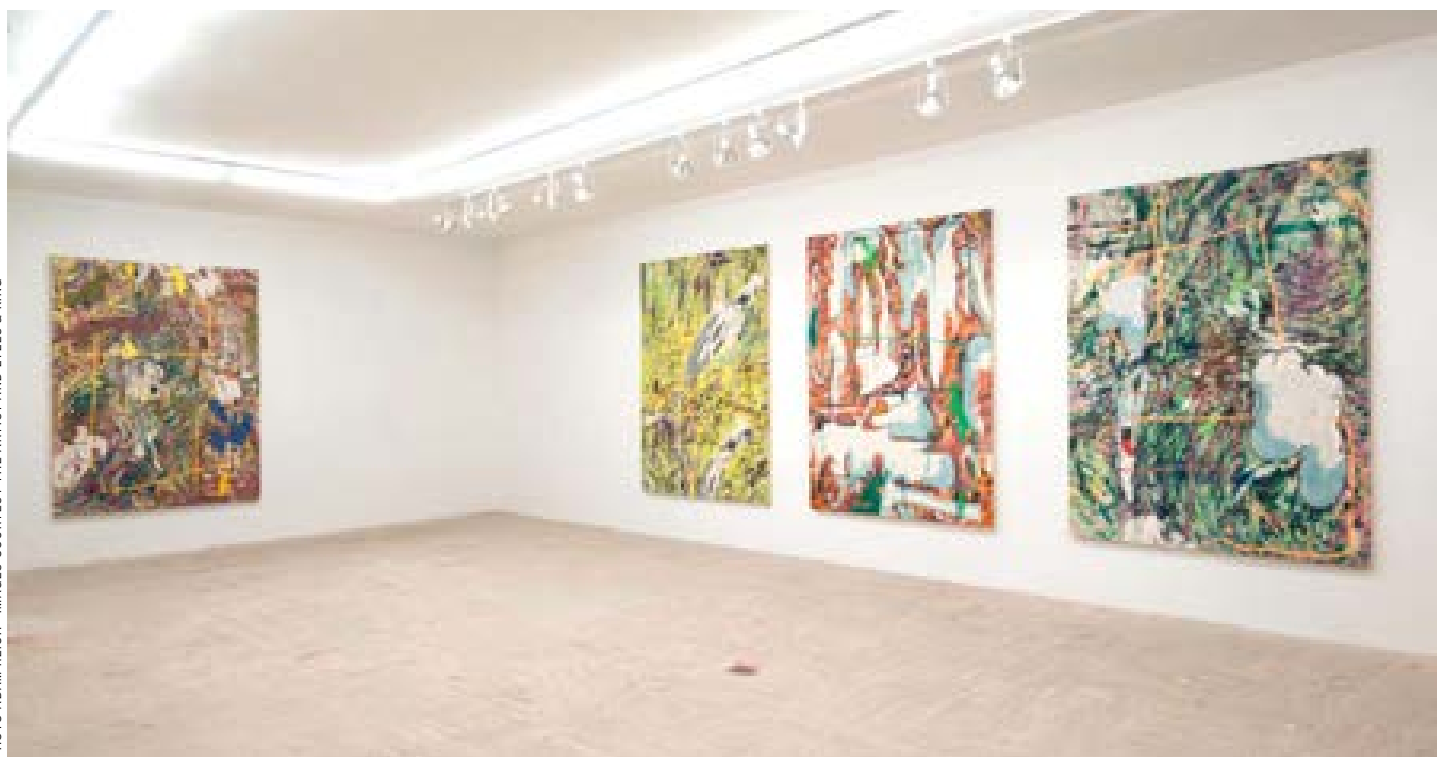
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ART VS SILICON VALLEY

# CHRIS HOOD

The Atlanta-born, New York-based artist **CHRIS HOOD** makes enigmatic works, painting backwards from recognizable forms—cartoon characters, icons, wide eyes—to a state of ambiguity. ‘If images are untrue then what is the truest painting of that untruth?’ he asks **EMILY STEER**.





*Was it always painting and mixed-media that interested you? Or have you become more fixed on the canvas as your career has progressed?*

My earlier work in multimedia was trying to find something new for painting by stretching painting out of itself. Painting as sculpture or installation. It was not until I trusted paintings, just as they are with their own language, that anything interesting started taking hold on the surface. As soon as I gave in and stopped trying to make a deceitful painting the possibilities opened up. It became an obsession. I think you have to dig in your heels and commit fully. We do not really use the term 'sculptor's sculptor' for a reason. The psychology is different.

*Is there a process that you follow for each piece?*

I developed a technique of making the work from the reverse which has its own physical qualities and limitations to negotiate. I have to build the imagery backwards, for example, and cannot paint over a particular area if I do not like it later. I am trying to describe a third, hybrid kind of space, so often a work will start with a loose sketch that incorporates elements of hand-drawing, digital collage and painting. Although each work has its own set of concerns, I essentially

set up a scenario of guided resolution for the painting, with my intuition and hand being the large variables between success and going in the trash.

*Where do you source the imagery for your work?*

It began as sticker collections in my youth. I became interested in mascots depicted in advertisements because of their ability to relay human emotion and create narrative. Slap a googly-eyes sticker on anything and it all of a sudden has a personality. Often other imagery speaks to me in a deadpan kind of way or has a connection to cultural vernacular. Many of our everyday cartoons and characters are archetypal images going back centuries—once used as fable, now to sell soap.

*You've recently begun working with some darker moods—can you tell me how or why these came about?*

It's always about finding contrasts. I want to raise the visual drama and explore some new settings and juxtapositions. I have been thinking about the paintings of St Sebastian for a while—all stuffed with arrows. Recently, I saw an apple in a bodega that someone had plugged all over with toothpicks which reminded me of those paintings, along with the Mexican sacred heart and bad

tattoos of heart-shaped grenades. I doubt those specific references will show up in a work of mine together but details like that collect over time and I will think about how to make a compelling painting with them.

*By contrast, there are many humorous elements at play; can this often be more challenging to put out there than the heavyweight elements?*

I think of the humour in my work more like a nervous laugh. It helps to get one's guards down and it can open up other content. Is this downtrodden little guy the artist, the viewer or some Faustian protagonist on display?

*You've spoken before about the cynicism that has developed around the honesty of the image in the time of the internet. How would you say this has affected painting?*

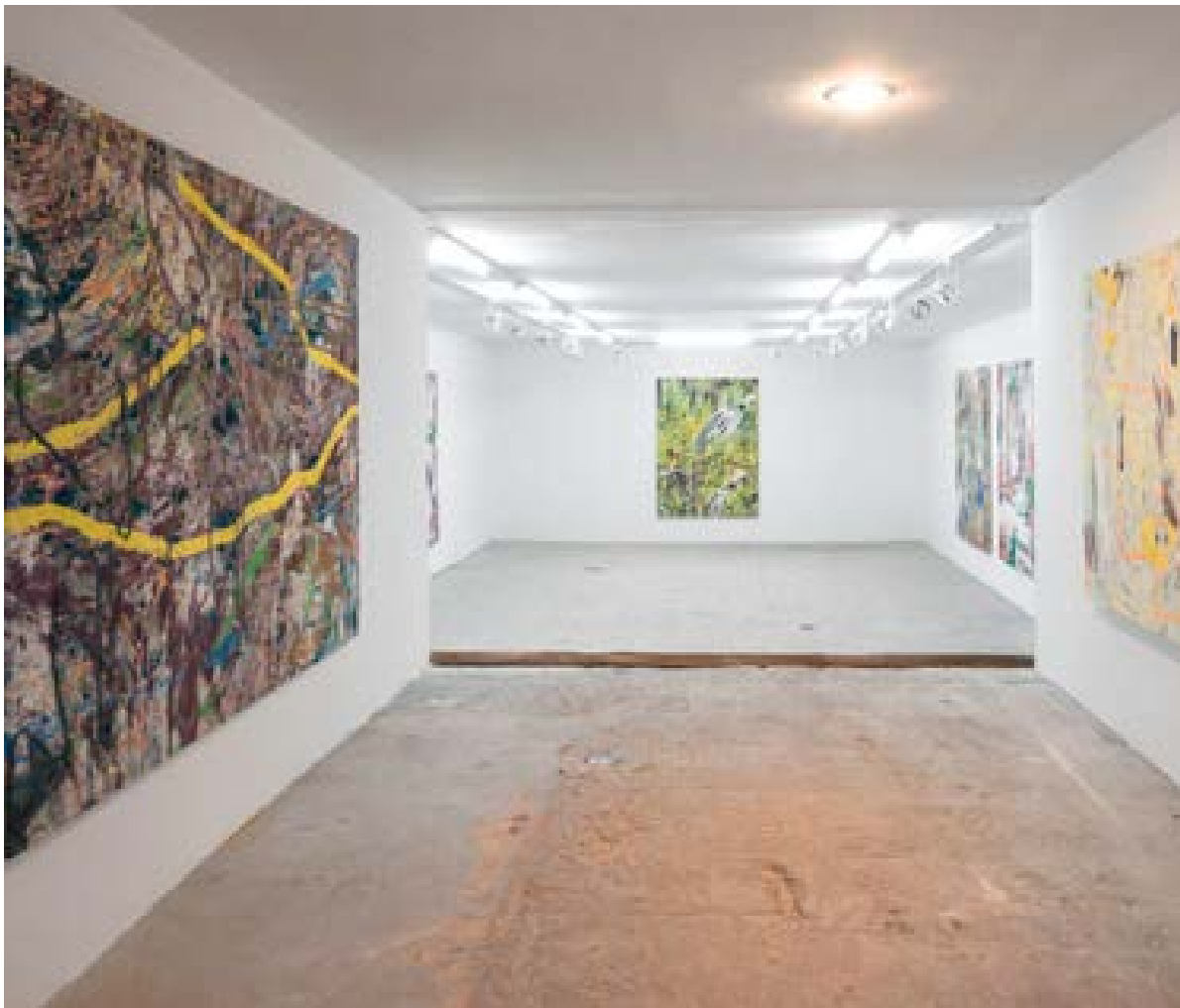
I believe this is the number one issue facing painting now. We have extremely sensitive viewing technologies, compelling virtual reality and the ability to see the surface of planets never visited, yet we are increasingly sceptical of photographs as proof. No one can make any bearing on what is real, but we are seeing more than ever before! If images are untrue, then what is the truest painting of that untruth? This problem with visuality has changed the scope of what it means

to be seeing in the world and painters should be some of the first to bat. I am sceptical that abstraction can address these issues. But I do not see this as a problem of 'unrealism', rather as something closer to a supra-reality.

*Who or what are your main influences?*

I became hugely interested in the simulated-reality hypothesis and holographic principle. If we are living in this kind of holographic reality, then we would not be able to tell. It now appears that the scientific data and anomalies in physics indicate this might just be the case. This is Plato's cave of the universe, time and space. I read Terrence McKenna and was turned on by his championing of the individual human being and the power of shamanistic visions. Though I certainly have my share of long-standing art heroes, I find it interesting how an influence sort of finds me suddenly when it clicks for my work. Carroll Dunham's early paintings, for example, have been a recent influence. Goethe's colour theory of shadows. Guston's fat fingers!

*Chris Hood is represented by Lyles & King, New York, and Rod Barton, London.*



**Previous pages, left**  
*IRL (Double Anamorph)*  
(detail)  
2015  
Oil on canvas  
203 x 150cm

**Previous pages, right, and  
this page, left**  
*Slow Drag in Margaritaville*  
Installation views

**Below left**  
*Acid Test Reflux*  
2015  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 200cm

**Opposite**  
*Synthetic Jesus*  
2016  
Oil on canvas  
213 x 168cm

PHOTO ADAM REICH





