



**Environment Made into Art: A Review of Mike Cloud's  
"Circle Chat" at Corbett vs. Dempsey**

by Alan Pocaro | April 7, 2025

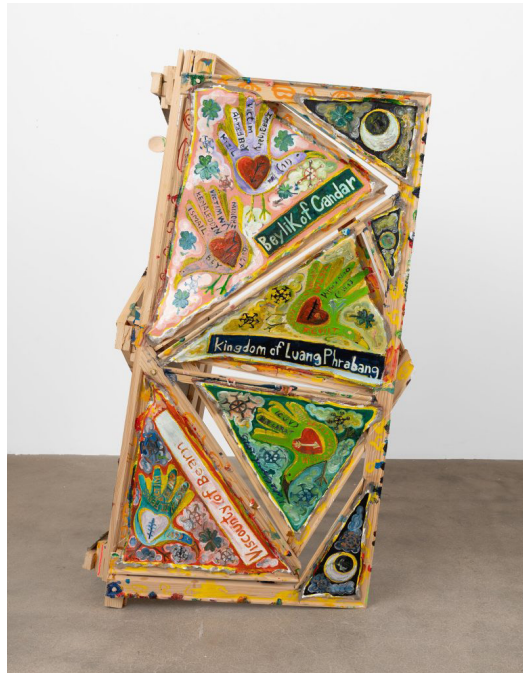


Mike Cloud, "Oyster Oil," 2025, oil on canvas, 36" x 48" x 30"/Photo: Corbett vs. Dempsey.

Somewhere along a narrow alley just off of Oakley or Leavitt, near the eastern edge of North Western Avenue behind an old row of red brick townhouses that, for an instant, could make you believe you were in Bushwick or Bed-Stuy, but definitely not Ukrainian Village, I saw an old tire leaning against the bright green neon limbs of a steel dumpster surrounded by brown paper and blue plastic wrappers, all in between a tall shopworn handle from an old broom with no brush. I saw it sitting there, a sculpture of the street, composed in accident, reticent, resting in solitude like the figure of a Buddha in the old kingdom of Luang Phrabang.

Robert Rauschenberg used to play a game. Young, broke, and as an eager artist of Texas just back from Italy swimming in New York maelstrom of intelligentsia, he would wake up, cigarette in hand, and prowling the streets of Lower East Side blocks and gather scraps of wire and wood, cardboard and cast off things, art supplies from the great free scratch-and-dent-store of the city. If he couldn't find it, he wouldn't buy it. To make his combines, it had to come from out there. Where the buses are beeping and ambulance sirens are wailing, the red-light cameras are flashing and snapping, dogs are barking and in the distance, kids, not pacified and lobotomized by screens, scream with joy of life.

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Mike Cloud, "Kingdom of Luang Phrabang,"  
2025, oil on canvas, 67" x 40" x 27"/Photo:  
Corbett vs. Dempsey

That is also the essence of Mike Cloud's strange, angular, mixed and muddy-colored sign-board show "Circle Chat." A broadside joy of life exhibition of new paintings, but maybe more accurately described as, or thought of as, sculptures that happen to be painted. They hang and stand like sacred objects of some foreign pavement, wooden canvas-stretcher structures as yet uncategorizable. They're free-associative in construction and content. Words writ in thick, viscous globs of oil paints are glazed in spirals across the many fractured surfaces. "Oyster Shell" becomes "Shell," becomes "Shell Oil," becomes "Oyster Oil," a hodgepodge of juxtaposition and signs you find alive only in the streets.

Cloud has his ear to the ground, though, and there's commentary on offer if you're in the mood to listen. "Matters of the Heart" is a looming large star of David. "Commercial Grade Diamond" is lozenge-shaped, all fiery red-orange in its canvas parts and its word play starts with the superheated phrase "blood diamond" before rolling out a series of permutations that speak to our lust for shiny things, even if it kills us or we kill for it. Some shows are the sterile cerebral offspring of disinfected studio environments, some shows are the environment made into art. "Circle Chat" is of the latter. These five helter-skelter conversations eschew the confines of formal gestalt and can't even be said to be "good" or "bad"; they can only be said to exist, like a broom, through a tire, against a dumpster, in an alley, on a block, in a city.

"Mike Cloud: Circle Chat" is on view at Corbett vs. Dempsey, 2156 West Fulton, through April 26.