

BENOÎT MAIRE  
*Cloud Paintings*

15 November 2017 - 14 January 2018

opening reception: Wednesday 15 November, 6-8pm

"In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability."

- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Arsenal Contemporary is pleased to present *Cloud Paintings*, an exhibition by Benoît Maire, bringing together a series of new paintings completed during a residency at Arsenal Contemporary Montréal.

Clouds are an elemental resource valued for their mutability. Sky-gazing has consistently shaped human culture, functioning as a gateway into the unknown for personal reflection, collectivized imaginings, and future portents. While, historically, clouds have provided the original forecasts for meteorology, today cloud-computing processes vast amounts of information to create predictive models for human behavior. What previously represented the house of God, contemporaneously functions as the foundation for artificial intelligence.

The signature flat bottom of Maire's clouds references popular cloud-computing icons. These symbols, either stenciled in or dripping down the canvas, appear as if seen through fog or on a clear day. Similarly, the paint itself mimics different types of condensation, appearing in thin wisps like cirrus clouds or heavy impasto shapes like cumulous clouds. The varied application of color and brushstrokes on unprimed or gessoed ground allows for mimesis to prevail in compositions teetering between process and object.

Maire joins a long tradition of artists who have taken up the heavens as subject matter. Medieval and Renaissance painters developed vast technical skills for depicting the sky. This was intensified in the 19th century by Romantic painters such as John Constable, who considered clouds to be "the chief organ of sentiment," communicating the inner-world of his subjects. The clouds reflect spirituality in both the cosmos and deep trenches of our psyches, offering a simpler understanding of ourselves and our environment.

A child's game of discovery, wherein likenesses are extracted from ephemeral and dispersed masses, is here invoked by the artist's ability to transform marks into common forms, to weave seamlessly between

abstraction and figuration. Maire's continued engagement with the sky emphasizes the canvas as a screen for emotional projection and, consequently, illustrates that paintings are an arena for the construction of an unstable pictorial system.

**Benoît Maire**, born in 1978 at Pessac, lives and works in Paris. Former resident of the Palais de Tokyo and student at Villa Arson, Maire studied art and philosophy, integrating them into his practice by giving shape to theoretical concepts.

Maire was awarded the Ricard prize alongside Isabelle Cornaro at the Fondation d'entreprise in 2010. Solo exhibitions have been held at CAPC, Bordeaux, France (upcoming); Croy Nielsen, Vienna, Austria; Jose Garcia, Merida, Mexico; Galerie Thomas Bernard, Paris, France; Kunstverein, Bielefeld, Germany; and David Roberts Art Fondation, London, England. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; Beaux-Arts de Paris, Paris, France; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; and ICA, London, England.



FRENCH EMBASSY  
IN THE UNITED STATES

HIGHER EDUCATION,  
ARTS, FRENCH LANGUAGE

With the support of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States.