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## 10 GQ-Approved Artists You Should Know at Art Basel Miami: Hugo McCloud

A former industrial designer, McCloud prefers to utilize materials you'd expect to see on a construction site, not inside a gallery. His works are made from materials like brass, heated black tar, and the silver paint often used to coat city rooftops. But despite the heaviness of his works, which include enormous metal sculptures and textured paintings, his process is actually quite methodical, influenced by the meditative repetition of traditional Indian woodblock printing and textile production.



**Name:** Hugo McCloud

**Age:** 34

**Hometown:** Redwood City, California

**Gallery:** Sean Kelly NYC, Luce Gallery (Turin, Italy)

**What He's Taking to Basel:** "A few paintings of how I see things at the moment."

**Tool(s) of Choice:** "Grinder, torch, palette knife."

**Influencers:** "Amina Muaddi, Angel Otero, Mark Bradford: Friends that are as passionate about creating as I am."

### **Tell us about your materials.**

The pieces I'm taking to Basel are made from liquid tar, aluminum foil, and the silver paint they use on roofs. I stamp the tar with wood blocks. Then I do my painting on top of that.

### **What are the stamps that you use?**

I carve them. The real story is I photographed the flower patterns on runaway mattresses in Brooklyn. Those are the patterns you see on the blocks. I used to carve them all by hand, but I don't have the time for that anymore. I did it for five months for my first show and that was enough practice. Now I draw them out and then my friend laser cuts them.

The real idea behind it for me was trying to figure out my patterns. I went to India two years ago and studied block printing, but I wanted to figure out patterns that were relevant to my life. That's how the idea and process began.

### **And what about the painting process?**

A lot of it is influenced by images that I see from Instagram. I'll pull images that I'm drawn to either because of the composition or colors or subject matter. And then I'll distort that original image; that's the initial process. One of these is actually a Rick Ross album cover. Another is a picture I took of an old Indian ornate design. Another is from Givenchy's Instagram. That's how I start.

### **What's your connection to fashion?**

My background is in design. I used to work with architects, designers, and developers, making lobbies for high-end condominium sites, which was really about using materials, or a combination of materials, for spaces. So a lot of the fashion designers I follow, like Riccardo Tischi, do work that's very architectural and textured. I think that's my relationship with fashion. I'm creating 2-D paintings, but at the same time I'm thinking about and creating a textural base.

### **I was reading your artist bio and you mentioned that you really like to explore the idea of beauty.**

So I find that my process and my work is about taking things that aren't initially looked at as beautiful and re-purposing them, re-configuring them, to find the beauty in it. There's something I find really interesting about using materials that are a part of everybody's everyday life. In New York City all the flat roofs are done with this torched down tar paper and silver paint. When you go over those roofs on the train, you see they're all silver.

Everybody has access to roofing materials and because they have access to it, they're nothing. But then you take it and put it up on the wall and it's like, 'Don't Touch This.' Now it's really something of value. You're changing the way people look at things.

### **Because it's so accessible we don't think of it as pretty.**

When you change the atmosphere of something it becomes totally different. So with my pieces, you could take one and put it on a construction site and you wouldn't think of it as anything, but when you put it into a white box, a gallery, it really changes your view.

To me, if you can read art immediately, or understand it immediately, it's not interesting.

### **Why do you think that relationship is important for people to experience?**

Because you're trying to create a dialogue. Even if an artist is producing bad art, they're still putting themselves out there to be judged. I think rather than just giving people something pretty to look at, it's more important to have a dialogue—a story that makes sense over time.

### **Do you want people to experience the same story you have in your mind?**

You want everybody to have their own relationship with the work. Whatever they see is valuable.

### **How do you know when a piece is finished?**

Every day I come in here, and maybe it's a good day; maybe I'm stressed; maybe I'm listening to nothing but house music; maybe I'm listening to 'Nothing' by Naas. So I think my mood can really affect my ideas.

Because I'm not painting for a client, I'm free to make spontaneous decisions. I think that's what art is supposed to be about: less questions more instinct. I always tell myself that nothing actually really matters. So just do it. That's why I'm glad I don't work on canvas. This roofing material is really forgivable, so I can always fix it.

### **What do you mean by forgivable?**

If I was working with canvas, I wouldn't be able to take a torch to it or scratch it with a knife. With this I can do whatever I want. I'm only careful once it's up on the wall.

The work is physically tiring. You see; if I hammer the stamp three times it's going to make a certain level of embossing. If I go really aggressive and put too much heat on it, it becomes softer. It's very irregular and that's why I was interested in creating these embossed paintings. It goes back to beauty: when a textile is printed by hand, it's never about perfection. But if you look at a textile that was made with a machine and something's off, then you can't help but notice the imperfection. That's something about how we perceive beauty and perfection.

### **How is Basel going to be different for you this year?**

The momentum has been building. Sean Kelly gallery asked me to do Basel and a solo show. I feel strongly about my work, as I hope any artist would. I'm very aggressive as an artist; I know where I want to go. I'm confident in my practice, so I'm going to keep pushing it.