

# Miami Painter Michael Clifford Employs Smoke Bombs, Satire, and Paper Towels

The young Miami-based painter Michael Clifford's canvases are created out of a romantic, spry sensibility that spans from his offbeat processes to the way he's described his practice since he graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago not long ago. The artist's practice, reads one tongue-in-cheek description, "consists of sour patch kids and pina colodas." And while that isn't exactly accurate in the strictest sense, Clifford certainly does work with whimsical materials that recall the blitheness of childhood's long and careless summer days.

**ARTSY EDITORIAL**

MAY 15TH, 2015 10:42 PM



*Installation view of "Michael Clifford: Playing Hands," Gallery Diet, Miami. Courtesy Gallery Diet and the artist.*



**michael clifford**  
*Fateful*, 2015  
Gallery Diet



**michael clifford**  
*Desire Over Easy*, 2015  
Gallery Diet



**michael clifford**  
*Desire Over Easy*, 2015  
Gallery Diet

Clifford uses smoke bombs and paper towels to create his at times figurative, at times abstract paintings. On his Twitter feed, he renders variations on wacky themes, including the “Michael Clifford painting” series, in which the artist photoshops a single image of himself with a roller running across the faces of pop-cultural reference points like Nicki Minaj and Luke Hemmings. Such are the points of intersection between Clifford’s work on wildly different platforms; always exuberant, often ironic, and relentlessly referential, the painter is most certainly a child of the internet age.



**michael clifford**  
*First Attempt After Forgetting*, 2015  
Gallery Diet



**michael clifford**  
*And Tragic In Blue*, 2015  
Gallery Diet

Now in his second solo show, “Playing Hands” at Miami’s Gallery Diet, Clifford has created seven works on Bounty paper towels and canvases, a series of hieroglyphic-filled, color-coded works that add a heightened sense of structure and intent to Clifford’s intuitive and often sprawling drawings. With their focus on materials vaguely suggesting suburban childhood, the pieces telegraph a hazy sense of nostalgia. Clifford’s abstracted symbols—flowers, sticks, marks resembling either hashtags or tic-tac-toe boards—are slightly familiar, yet ultimately obscure, inviting the viewer to superimpose their own meaning. Yet their simplicity and texture (Clifford often paints with his hands) echo the sense of play and that is central to the artist’s practice.



**michael clifford**  
*For A Good Time Call*, 2015  
Gallery Diet



**michael clifford**  
*A Subtle Dance w/ Chance*, 2015  
Gallery Diet

Clifford’s strength, in “Playing Hands,” is in making the chaotic appear tidy, the obscure appear not only whole, but instantly recognizable. In his alphabet of invented and symbolic gestures he has created, if not a language, a convincing visual world.

“Playing Hands” is on view at Gallery Diet, Miami, May 8th–Jun. 13th.