

Press Release
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Mirror of the Times

Opening reception: Saturday, September 7 from 6:30pm-9:30pm



Time Magazine, May 4, 1981 Cover.



The Money Chase, 2024, Acrylic, 9 x 12 in

Welancora Gallery is pleased to present *Mirror of the Times*, Chris Cook's second solo exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition will be on view from September 7 to October 3, 2024. The opening reception will be held on Saturday, September 7, 2024 from 6:30pm-9:30pm at 410 Jefferson Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, our temporary project space.

Composed of an ongoing series of acrylic paintings, the works in the exhibition serve as Cook's method of stimulating a dialogue between the tangible and intangible as it relates to varied socio-economic and political issues in the United States. The title, *Mirror of the Times*, draws reference to the 19th century publication of the same name: the first African American newspaper published in California. Through an exploration of social and cultural paradigms, Cook manipulates print media to reveal the ways propaganda and stereotypes seep into popular culture to shape our world view. Harnessing a pop-art influence, he deletes, crosses out, rewrites, and replaces imagery, taglines and main cover lines to challenge long-held narratives by creating his own. Prominent publications and vintage posters, including *Time*, *Jet*, and *Life Magazine*, are reimagined through satire and commentary. Headlines from the 1930s are referenced as a means of commenting on current events and in so doing become a testament to the persistent and unchanging issues that continue to exist in the American zeitgeist.

Cook critiques the assumptions perpetuated by print media and encourages a critical examination of these influences. Through these works, he examines the portrayal of race, gender, and economic status within media spheres; however, his work goes beyond the scope of race alone, exploring gun violence, the educational system, gentrification, and the treatment of women. Moreover, Cook's work connects deeply with the broader American experience, delving into hierarchical class distinctions. Instead, he offers a nuanced exploration of societal issues, prompting a reevaluation of commonly accepted narratives and encouraging a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences within America.

The show explores the enduring power of media and its iconographic imagery in shifting perspectives across generations. Cook invites us to inspect how publications, flyers, and advertisements generate and perpetuate cultural narratives across time. This collapse of time is of particular interest, reflecting the cyclical nature of news systems within paintings that bridge historical and contemporary contexts. A sense of timelessness is captured within Cook's piece, *The Money Chase*, as themes of educational monetization transcend the 40 year passage of time from the cover's original publication to Cook's reproduction. Alterations are made to the text – "business schools" changed to "American schools" and "MBA" altered to "MFA" – and the imagery. The headlines themselves reflect an enduring cultural conscience: what is decided to be the greatest concern to the public? What fears linger behind the headlines? Such shifts reflect a changing cultural sphere, while still echoing the entanglement of decades-old themes. In such ways, Cook nods at the ways the educational system has changed in its monetary pursuits. Through the alterations of imagery in these pieces, he encourages the viewer to examine their own shifts in perspective.

About the Artist:

Chris Cook (b. 1992) is a fine art photographer born in Brooklyn, New York known for documenting the urban landscape in cities across the United States and abroad. His artistic background is rooted in traditional and digital photography. Much of his practice is centered around developing a vast chronicle of issues his generation faces by creating work that preserves histories, records experiences, and captures the human condition. In 2020, Cook extensively documented scenes from the Black Lives Matter protests, capturing struggle, resilience, and hope on film and digital formats. Aligned with the works in Titus Kaphar's exhibition at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, *Unseen: Our Past in a New Light*, Cook continuously constructs bodies of work that invite another narrative or way of seeing underrepresented and misunderstood communities.

In 2022, a monograph of his works, *Black Lives Matter*, was published by the Valentine Museum of Art, and has since been acquired by The Whitney Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The British Library, Pratt Institute, and Yale University among others. He has assisted and worked alongside other photographers including Ming Smith, Jamel Shabazz, and Ahmed Klink. Cook was an artist in residence at the Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts (2021), a recipient of the AIM Fellowship at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (2020) and a recipient of the New York City Artists Corp Grant (2021). Cook's work has been featured in a range of publications, including

The Washington Post, Lomography, and ABC News. He has had solo exhibitions with Welancora Gallery and Wilmer Jennings Gallery. After completing the Bronx Museum's annual Artist in the Marketplace Fellowship Program (AIM) Cook's work was featured in the first half of the 2024 Sixth AIM Biennial at the Bronx Museum. Cook currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.