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With Coffee Beans as His Medium, Chase Hall Paints His Autobiography

At Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich, the artist's "Clouds in my Coffee" exhibition presents new paintings whose medium is derived from African coffee beans.

Chase Hall's power as an artist exists in his uncanny ability to create a new paradigm around painting. By applying coffee bean stain to raw cotton canvas and exposing his figures' features, he articulates an invisible language which simultaneously challenges and pays homage to his genealogy. Hall acknowledges the complexities of growing up as a biracial man in the United States and thus, the constant need for "code switching and living like a chameleon," he says. He finds painting to be a cathartic necessity to interpret his "hybrid reality," one "where he is oscillating between stereotypes." Hall's works are deeply autobiographical with personal hieroglyphics scattered throughout his vignettes, and yet his paintings remain remarkably timeless.

Hall's first European solo exhibition "Clouds in my Coffee," which is on view at Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich through April 9, showcases 17 paintings that embody the essence of Hall's psyche. Coffee plays an intrinsic role in the artist's work—he utilizes African beans to create 26 monochromatic brown pigments that vary in texture from watercolour to an impasto "mud" consistency, and

then paints with them. Hall's poignant use of the material with ties to trade, exploitation and commodification "demands more than the alchemy of paint." His application of an inventive texture authored solely to him enables an unmistakable personalization of his work.



Chase Hall, *Early Bird*, 2021.

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When asked about his process to achieve such authenticity, Hall emphasizes introspection and "falling in love with the parts of me I didn't want to talk about." He speaks to his predominantly nomadic childhood, moving many times until eventually settling in New York. His formative years living across the U.S. informed him on the nuance and humility of "placelessness," as well as emboldened him to identify and find value "in between the absolute." With a smile he adds, "There is more to life in these in between spaces." Hall's painting *Spelling Bee (Eureka)* (2022) captures this moment of reckoning where the subjects recognize their potential to live outside of the trope imposed upon them.



Chase Hall, *Sluggers*, 2021.

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and Galerie Eva Presenhuber.

Growing up in ever-changing environments, baseball was a haven to Hall and thus appears regularly throughout the exhibition in works such as *Three Balls*, *Two Strikes* (2021), *Sluggers* (2021) and *First Run* (2021). Hall's mother is also a constant throughout his life and his painting *Horace Green* (2021) depicts her favorite animal as a maternal symbol. He explores the motif of horseback riding as a symbol of Black leisure and in relation to Black adventurism in *Where You Smoke* (2022). Hall sees "painting acts as a nonlinear time travel," he says, and his subjects appear as amalgamations of the past, present and future. He cites how clothing is personal armor and a place of pride, while also precipitating stereotypes about class and representation.

Hall is fundamentally optimistic and yet he notes how the cotton canvas behind his compositions agitates his figures and haunts his paintings. Nevertheless, his visionary use of coffee as a dynamic medium and sensitive subject matter maneuvers uncharted territory, pushing ahead to make room for a new generation of figurative artists.