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Art exhibit showcases UT Martin professor's work

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Pictured is Jason Stout's oil painting "Ignition" on display in the Clara M. Eagle Gallery. (Photo courtesy of Jason Stout)

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"Ignition," an exhibit of paintings and drawings by artist and University of Tennessee at Martin professor of art Jason Stout, opened at the Murray State Clara M. Eagle Gallery on Tuesday, Jan. 19.

The “Ignition” exhibit collects work from Stout’s Cloud Composition series, created from 2015 to 2019. The cloud compositions are distinct in their saturated colors, socio-political overtones and unique composition. They resemble the “big ball of violence” trope popular in comic strips and cartoons, with arms, weapons and various other objects extending from a central cloud.

Stout said his use of color and composition in “Ignition” is very important in creating the intended viewing experience. The pieces do not have a traditional background, foreground or middle ground, but are composed in a way to pull in the viewer and quickly push them back out.

“The design of the information is to get you to spin,” Stout said. “You are moving in and out of the painting and then also around at the same time. This goes conceptually with the idea of media spin, but also being totally overwhelmed with multiple narratives coexisting in the composition, not just one, which is tough to do in a static image such as a painting or drawing.”

T. Michael Martin, assistant professor of art and design and director of University Galleries at Murray State, became interested in exhibiting Stout’s cloud compositions last year.

“I contacted Stout to gauge his interest in presenting the works at Murray State during the protests and unrest happening in early 2020,” Martin said. “I felt that curating a sampling of those works and presenting a solo exhibition featuring the conflict paintings and drawings would be very relevant and timely for this moment in America.”

Martin said the exhibit has become even more relevant as political tension has only grown since the initial decision to bring the work to Murray State, citing the events at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

“Jason Stout has been observing these behaviors as part of his studio practice since 2015, and possibly before, so one might give him credit for having a little foresight to the undercurrent and growing tensions he felt were

important to research and present as a body of work dealing with struggle, altercations and cultural turbulence,” Martin said.

Stout wanted the work in “Ignition” to reflect an array of different issues and anxieties rather than having paintings and drawings reflect on a single subject. He believes much of the intensity of the last five years comes from multiple issues coexisting and building upon each other.

“The visual language in the work is simplified but abundant,” Stout said. “I want the viewer to feel overwhelmed, because I think that is the perfect reflection of how American society has been in the past five years.”



Pictured is Jason Stout's painting “The Cloud” on display in the Clara M. Eagle Gallery. (Dionte Berry/The News)

National issues being left unresolved and eventually accumulating and “exploding” is what gave the “Ignition” exhibit its name.

Stout said the format he developed with his cloud compositions lends itself to showing the plurality of conflict.

“The viewer really can read the order of the parts in the painting in a variety of ways, and the combinations of how they are ordered all create different results,” Stout said.

He said the work also had to respond to the speed and escalation of the news cycle.

Southern identity is also a major component of “Ignition.”

“I think the south lives in constant conflict over our identity,” Stout said. “We struggle with our history and our progressiveness. We struggle with finding new ways of living, new solutions, while also holding the heavy responsibility of guarding old tradition. Several of these paintings deal with this conflict.”

He added that the south has a strong oral tradition that makes history an important part of the culture.

While “Ignition” deals strongly in socio-political themes, there are more personal aspects to Stout’s work as well. Some pieces close to his heart are those that deal with fatherhood.

“My little boy was born right before this body of work started, so as it evolved he was growing up and during the period of experiencing everything going on I had to not only consider how it made me think about my work, but also how it made me think about being a father,” Stout said.

He enjoyed fitting references to his son into his work, like his toboggan in “Hats for Bats” and his toys in “Greyson Salvo Barrage.”



The art exhibit “Ignition” makes a comment on politics and social issues using clouds. (Dionte Berry/The News)

“Ignition” opens on Tuesday, Jan. 19, and will be on display until Feb. 17 in the Clara M. Eagle Gallery on the sixth floor of the Price Doyle Fine Arts Building. The exhibition is free and open to the public from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

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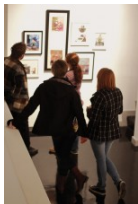


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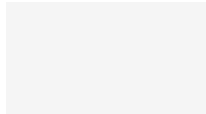
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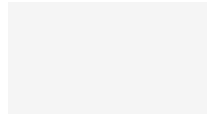
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