

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

ARTNEWS

TACITA DEAN
AT MARIAN GOODMAN, NEW YORK

By Alfred Mac Adam (March 28, 2016)



Tacita Dean, Portraits, 2016, 16mm color film, optical sound, 16 minutes, installation view.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

There are five parts to Tacita Dean's comprehensive show of drawings, photography, and film, all of which constitute an allegorical self-portrait of the artist. But it's a self-portrait à l'anglaise in which she the artist explores facets of her English self: nature, portrait painting, and theatricality. An aesthetic expatriate, Dean lives in Berlin but spent some 18 months in Los Angeles, where she discovered clouds.

Dean follows suit, but she grounds her cloud works in language, specifically A Complete Concordance to Shakespeare, which provides epigraphs or titles for almost every drawing. Thus Yond' same cloud cannot choose (2015) takes its cue from The Tempest, act 2, scene 2, where Trinculo, about to stumble on Caliban, assumes he will soon be soaked by rain. The association between Dean's image and Shakespeare may be merely a matter of chance, but her swirling cloud, her monochrome sky seem somehow prophetic. An illusion, of course,

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but a reminder that “reading” clouds is an attempt to turn nature into a book of secrets open only to adepts. This sense of mystery and the sublime—the ephemeral cloud against an infinite sky—characterizes all of these slate drawings, perhaps Dean’s most beautiful work.



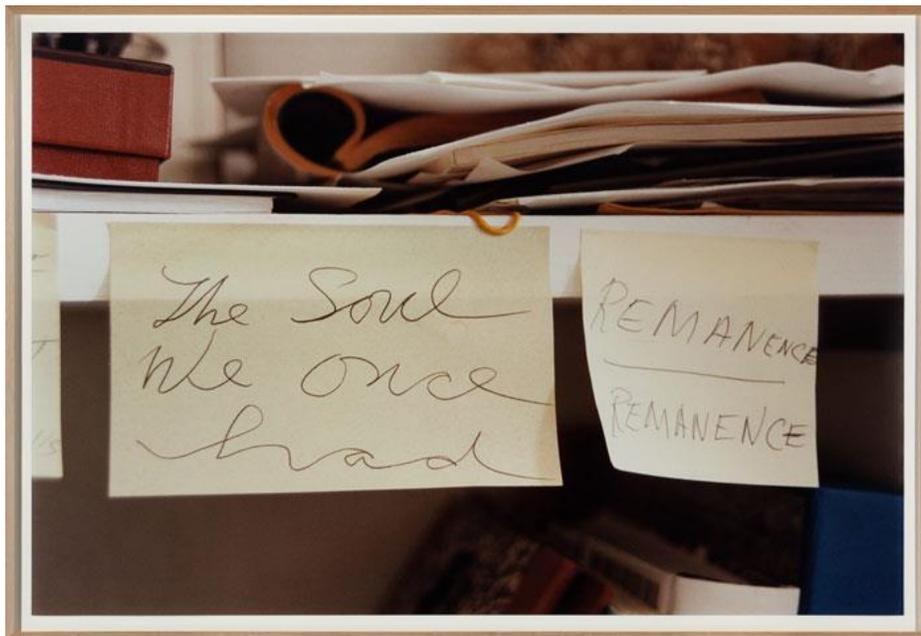
Tacita Dean, *Yond' same black cloud*, 2015, spray chalk and white gouache on slate, 48 x 48 x $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, top; *Veteran Too*, 2016, chalkboard paint on hand-printed silver gelatin photograph mounted on paper, 39 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, bottom.

ALEX YUZDON/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

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The film components of the show are travel pieces, visits to artists. Perhaps the most striking is her *Buon Fresco* (2014). Dean, using a macro lens, focuses on Giotto's Saint Francis frescoes. Putting herself and us in the same position as Giotto as he was working on them, she gives us a strange insight into the mechanics of Giotto's work. The effect is, again, to pass into a kind of abstraction—we literally get lost in the details—even though we know there is a narrative unfolding on the wall.



Tacita Dean, *GAETA Fifty photographs*, 2015, hand-printed C-print on matte paper mounted on paper, 11¾ x 17¼ inches. CATHY CARVER/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

Portraits (2016) is a 16-millimeter film lasting 16 minutes, showing David Hockney smoking. The fact that he actually smoked five cigarettes and that we experience them as one reminds us of Van Dyck's *Portrait of Charles I in Three Positions* (1635–36). It takes more than one cigarette to make a Hockney. "GAETA, 2015 – fifty photographs, plus one" is fifty photographs Dean took in Cy Twombly's house and studio in Italy. Twombly participated in the selection of images, so the array constitutes an homage to him and the end of an era: the prints were made on the last available Cibachrome photographic paper.

The final component of the show, *Event for a Stage* (2015), constitutes Dean's experiment in theater. This was a live performance at the 2014 Sydney Biennial. There were four performances on consecutive nights, which Dean filmed and edited into this 50-minute film. Here she is artist, director, and participant, but what links this film to the drawings and other videos is the notion of Dean as a solitary artist haunted and helped by tradition. The actors move back and forth before the audience with Dean behind them, in front of them, alongside them, experiencing the anguish of the mediation in all art: to express something the artist needs a medium, and at some point, the medium expresses itself.

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