



Eric N. Mack's Misa-Hylton Brim installation. Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, photography Jamie Stoker

## The painter paying homage to Missy Elliott and Mary J. Blige's 90s stylist

Eric N. Mack launches his first London solo show with an intricate and expansive series of works

"I recently had an epiphany," says New York-based artist [Eric N. Mack](#) in a composed, distinctly candid tone tinged with humour. "I thought about quilted moving blankets, and how there's this whole unseen, underlying structure that allows them to be plush, more plush, than the surface enables us to see – behind this simple, essentialised rectangle lies a premeditated relationship to the body: one that's about softness, protection, warmth."

Unsurprisingly – much like the moving blankets often encountered in his work – Mack is more than meets the eye. Born in Maryland and originally trained as a painter and sculptor, the 31-year-old was never one to espouse conventional definitions of what art can, or should be. “I want to create something that feels special, specific to who I am,” he explains. “I’ve always questioned these rigid definitions of painting, sculpture, and other forms of art. Why all these constraints?” To create his dynamic, large-scale pieces, Mack assembles a combination of used textiles, stained or dyed fabrics, worn clothes, torn rags, and image collages often sourced in books or magazines. The result is a hyper-tactile mix of conceptual and personal, symbolic and accessible, abstract and utilitarian. “I want my work to be open,” asserts the artist. “The openness of what I make has to do with the viewer and finding that universal access point for people to resonate with. That’s why I started getting interested in fashion.”

## **“I’ve always questioned these rigid definitions of painting, sculpture, and other forms of art. Why all these constraints?” – Eric N. Mack**

Indeed, fashion has been an enduring source of inspiration for Mack – he cites Ghesquière-era Balenciaga and 90s Prada as influences, and he recently collaborated with Grace Wales Bonner, creating the set design for her [AW18 London menswear show](#) as well as an installation for the launch of her SS18 collection in New York.

For his first UK solo exhibition, *Misa Hylton-Brim*, held at London’s Simon Lee Gallery, Mack delved deeper into the ever-present dialogue between fashion and art. The title of the show is named after 90s hip hop stylist Misa Hylton-Brim, who was responsible for some of the most iconic looks in the music industry for artists including Missy Elliott, Mary J. Blige, and Puff Daddy, using fashion to make expressive visual statements about their identities. “Fashion embodies a big part of my visual ethos and the way I think about things aesthetically; it has a lot of slippage,” argues the artist. “Looking at great clothes, or great style and wondering ‘what makes that great?’ is very similar to looking at how an artwork is structured and constructed.” Much of what sparked Mack’s interest in fashion stems from its ongoing deconstruction and redefinition of beauty. “It has a really specific language, more accessible and evocative,” he says. “The frames are a little broken, and the way in which people regard things within fashion as beautiful is slightly distorted and open – it can be about use, practicality, but also about wild concepts, frivolity or maximalism.”



"The Brazen Image / The Thief of Sleep" (2018). Acrylic, dye, paper, sateen blanket and silk handkerchief on moving blanket Photography Matt Grubb

Contrasts and openness are at the heart of Mack's patchwork pieces, which almost always seem to tell a story – one often intimate, personal and informed by memory, yet amplified, saturated and utterly free of spatial limitations. At first sight, his creations might come across as a form of purely intuitive catharsis, but in reality, the young artist never lets his instinct run wild.

"Whenever I have a particular intuition, I always to locate it, frame it, intellectualise it," he concludes. "The intimacy of a gesture is something I'm very aware of, and I use a lot of restraint when I put myself into my work. I moderate it so that I can make it perceptive and people can see themselves in it, too."



Eric N. Mack's Misa-Hylton Brim installation Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, photography Jamie Stoker