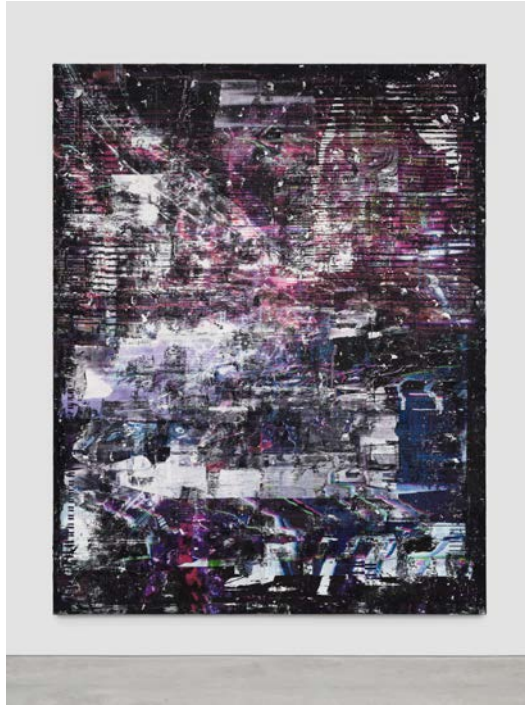


## SOLO SHOWS

### Chris Dorland, historian for the future

February 25, 2023 8:29 am



*Chris Dorland, untitled (Cipher), 2023*

Contributed by Sharon Butler / As curators Eleanor Cayre and Dean Kissick pointed out for their 2022 summer show “**The Painter’s New Tools**,” most painters use computers in the studio, whether to make composite image studies, scan and print 3-D models, create animations, or simply display large-scale imagery. To a greater or lesser degree, all artists are engaged in digital practice these days. Chris Dorland goes at least a meta-step farther. His dazzling paintings, on display in “shellcode” at Lyles & King, are indeed made with digital tools. But Dorland’s new work is primarily about the evolution of the digital environment itself.



*Chris Dorland, untitled (cipher), 2023, detail*

Over the years, he has collected imagery gleaned from our online surroundings, and, orchestrating a complex interaction of paint and computer imagery, embeds the history of digital art into his paintings. As in previous work, he continues to lift the titles, like “shellcode” and “legacy software” from the tech sector. Look closely and you can see the bitmap icons, early computer generated drawings and mesh grids, scan’s of dot-matrix printing, the distinctive color palette, early cyberpunk glitch, coding languages, and the cinematic dark distance we have come to think of as “cyberspace.” It’s all there, jammed in to one uncanny place and embedded in thickly striated paint. Dorland’s goal is to capture a nascent canon that’s being written in real time.



*Chris Dorland, untitled (legacy software), 2023*

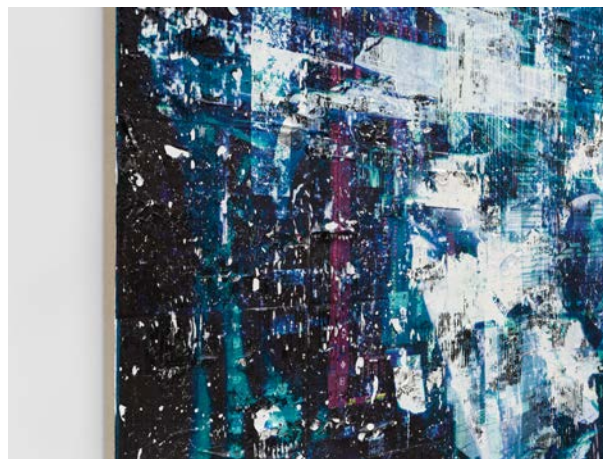


*Chris Dorland, untitled (legacy software), 2023, Detail*

In 2009, Dorland started using video as a means of expanding his visual vocabulary beyond what was possible in painting. The moving image enabled him to incorporate the narrative and hypnotic power of advertising, and he started making three- to five-second looped GIFs that, although short, were dense and engaging. During this period, artists were beginning to lose faith in the possibilities of technology, and the general outlook was becoming more and more dystopic. A recent ad for Adobe touts new developments in the digital environment, suggesting that the immersive experiences will “include metaverses – rich, persistent, shared interactive experiences with collaboration and co-creation, as well as fully functioning shared economies – and other experiences targeted to shopping, job training, play and gaming, education, remote meetings, cultural experiences, and more.” Such breathlessly irony-free promotion induces eye-rolling in both the cognitive and the normative sense. We aren’t rubes when it comes to the digital space anymore, and each day we become more cynical about technological innovation. Dorland draws meaning, hope even, from this flattening sociological phenomenon.

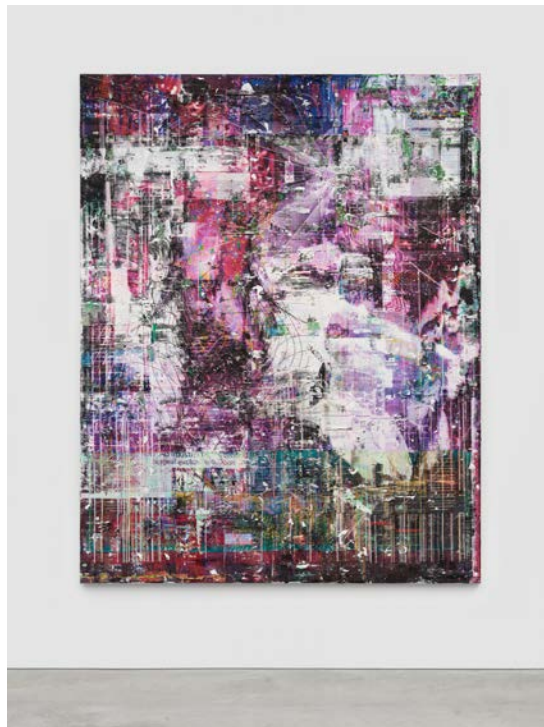


*Chris Dorland, untitled (console), 2023*

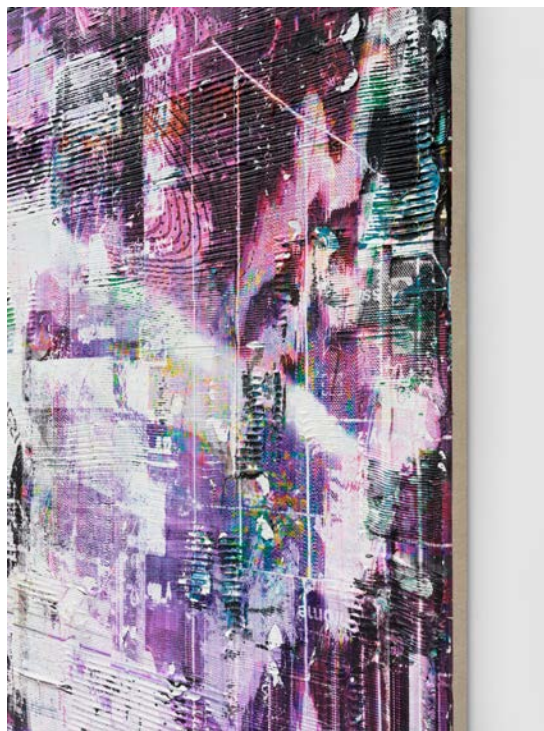


*Chris Dorland, untitled (console), 2023, Detail*

Artists like **Albert Oehlen**, **Wade Guyton**, **Pieter Schoolwerth**, and **Jacqueline Humphries** have been riffing on the digital aesthetic for years. **Seth Price**, in his book ***Fuck Seth Price***, created the character of a young painter whose work is described as “Foxconn worker’s accidental Coke spills on Nigerian mud cloth, scanned and randomly manipulated in Photoshop, printed on Belgian linen stretched over a vacuum-formed frame” – a hilarious description that sparked Dorland’s ideas about combining digital technology and painting. **Monsieur Zohore**’s paintings on paper towels struck a chord with him, as did the screen sculptures of Brussels-based artist **Janne Schimmel**, in which gaming, science fiction, and impending disaster all play a role. Also on Dorland’s radar are artists such as **Tishan Hsu**, **Fabian Marcaccio**, and **Joseph Nechvatal**, who have been immersed in digital technology since the 1990s.



*Chris Dorland, untitled (shellcode), 2023*



*Chris Dorland, untitled (shellcode), 2023, Detail*

Combining traditional painting, image curation, compositing, and inkjet printing, Dorland’s new large-scale paintings suggest that cyberpunk is now history. Technology, of course, will keep developing; advancing AI and data collection capabilities will continue to impress, overwhelm, and worry the hell out of us. But Dorland’s images, which layer samples of pictures he’s had in his computer files for years, strike me as transformatively curated artifacts of a gentler if far from perfect era. His sly deployment of old tech not only records its moment and its obsolescence but also reminds us of the optimistic promise that digital innovation held a mere 30 years ago. We can appreciate Dorland’s paintings as prescient depictions of all the detritus — digital signals and discarded computer infrastructure — that will be littered throughout the universe long after humans are gone, like a **Rosetta stone** for the next iteration.

**“Chris Dorland: shellcode,”** Lyles & King, 19 Henry Street, New York, NY. February 24 to April 1, 2023.