

# ARTNEWS

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### THE ARTIST IS SORT OF PRESENT: MARK FLOOD NOW HAS HIS OWN CHELSEA GALLERY

by M. H. Miller



Mark Flood's new gallery, located on West 22nd Street.

The painter Mark Flood was sitting on a couch in his new Chelsea storefront gallery on West 22nd Street, watching languidly as several young art handlers were hanging the new show.

"I guess we could go ahead and put the short ones up there," he said. "Put a couple up there. I guess we'll have to get a ladder in here."

Flood is a wry stylist whose text-based paintings recall a less serious Christopher Wool. He paints brand logos and mordant slogans ("Another Painting" is a recurring phrase on his canvases) and his main subject is the art world itself. This interest has also manifested in recent quasi-performances about the business of art, like last May's Insider Art Fair, a fair Flood organized around his own work that mocked the market frenzy for contemporary art while still taking part in it (even if, at that show, he had assistants drag his six-figure lace paintings across the floor, while other assistants crawled on their hands and knees after them). Flood's gallery, a small room with glass doors adjacent to his dealer Zach Feuer, is more of an earnest tribute to the art Flood likes: all of the works are from his private collection, and, actually, none of it is for sale. Flood, who lives in Texas, makes only rare appearances in the space.

"I'm not really into the White Cube," Flood told me at the gallery. (He was in town for a few days.) "I like people sitting down and hanging out." Near the entrance was a painting that said "Desk" and another that said "Chair." In a corner was a mattress because, Flood said, "looking at art while you're laying on a mattress is a great way

to look at art.” The room was filled with the handlers and two young artists that sat on the couch mostly in silence for the duration of my visit. One of them got up at one point to lie on the mattress. There was a long shelf with two cans of Richard Prince’s lemon fizz drink that he made for AriZona Beverages and several small works by Brad Troemel including a framed print depicting a white laptop and the Flood-esque phrase “NET ART COMMUNITY TO BRAD: WE DON’T LIKE U!” Flood had hung a curtain of black plastic near the back of the room, creating a partition for storage, though the plastic was deliberately frayed so that the works behind it were clearly visible.

The incoming show featured the work of El Franco Lee, a Houston, Texas, native whom Flood described as “a recluse.” His remarkable paintings include a diptych that depicts someone purchasing drugs from DJ Screw, the inventor of the “chopped and screwed” production style, and a motel stick-up gone awry.

“In New York, little things can have big repercussions,” Flood said. “This gallery’s just a little, tiny thing. Some people you may not normally see in the city are up on the wall, and I’ll let the chips fall where they may. That’s the way I feel about everything. I’m used to being obscured. I’m kind of surprised that things have gotten a little bigger. I think it’s good to kind of help everybody out. I guess that’s what everyone in the art world is doing. It seems like kind of a sinister business, but it’s full of people who are obsessed with art. I’m another one of those. I don’t have to do anything but look at these great paintings.”

When I asked Flood, who worked for years as an assistant at the Menil Collection and remained unknown for a long time, how his life has changed since “things have gotten a little bigger,” he grew uncomfortable.

“Well, for me personally it’s, like, bigger opportunities,” he said. He cleared his throat loudly and paused. “So.”

He said he still lives over a garage in Houston and has “a strong tendency to try things out then detach from the outcome. I have a gallery, I don’t really care what happens. I had that art fair—I was like, I’m gonna do this, we’ll see what happens. I still have my garage apartment. If it all goes away I can go back in there and start smoking pot again.”

Flood said he amassed a good deal of his art collection by buying art that was about to be discarded anyway, though now that he has some disposable income he buys from galleries. “I try not to even look at art at art fairs,” he said, “but even if you do that there will be something where you just say, ‘I want that!’”

“You go to art fairs?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“Do you take a perverse interest in them or do you genuinely like them?”

“What would be perverse about an artist going to an art fair?”

I mentioned Joseph Kosuth’s famous line that an artist at an art fair is “like a whore at a pimp convention.”

“Why would a whore not go to a pimp convention?” Flood asked with growing frustration. “To me the whole idea that an artist is some kind of tender little thing that can never be touched—I started going to art fairs when nobody showed me at art fairs, and I had no New York dealer, because I wanted to see what an art fair was like. And it was, like, horrible, but life is horrible. I went to Alcatraz and people are all there trying out death cells for size. Why would they do that? It’s like if you’re in the art business, art fairs are the business. I like to take artists to art fairs. The whole idea that everybody is this tender lily that can’t be exposed to the harmful gamma rays of reality is like a huge bore to me. I mean, why not? The more you know the better you are.”

“People who are obsessed with how evil and corrupt the world is,” he added, “I mean, they should go live in a convent.”

The gallery, I’ve failed to mention until now, is called Mark Flood Resents.