

IS ARTIST MARK FLOOD THE SECRET ROBIN HOOD OF THE ART WORLD?

by Ryan Steadman



Mark Flood. (Courtesy of the artist)

Today many young artists think about their career arc more than their artwork. Even recent art school grads co-opt dominant styles, target cool places to show and cozy up to “the right people” with a calculating eye. This was not the case with Mark Flood.

Mr. Flood emerged, or as he would likely say “submerged,” in the 1980s in his hometown of Houston, Texas, working on cheeky, media-inspired collages while playing in his punk band, Culturecide. He languished there for years before eventually finding recognition with a series of works begun in the 1990s called “The Lace Paintings,” which utilize painted and frayed lace to make luminous, abstract riffs on quaint decoration. These paintings drove collectors mad with a fervor rarely seen for an artist past the age of 40 (he’s 59), and soon they were fetching upward of \$50,000 at auction, even topping the \$200,000 mark at one point.

But rather than pack up and relocate to a tropical island, Mr. Flood used his success as a podium to rail against the establishment—art and otherwise. A series of text paintings followed, commenting on the art world both blithely, as in 1997’s *Art World* which states: “The same painting over and over (for a while)” and bitterly, as in *Endless Column*, 2012, which spews the words: “Whore Museums, Gutless Collectors, Blind Dealers, So-Called Artists.”

But then Mr. Flood really upped the ante. Not satisfied with his singular platform as “artist,” he decided to stage the “Insider Art Fair”: a mock art fair of his own work. He followed the fair with a series of site-specific group shows starring artists he has

collected, worked with, shown with or hired. Now he brings us a curated group show (which includes his own work alongside select contemporaries) at Marlborough Chelsea titled "The Future is Ow," which opens today, Jan. 6 and runs through Feb. 6.

We spoke to the artist on the eve of the opening.

Mark Flood: What do they say about me on the mean streets of Brooklyn, Ryan?

Well, I hear that despite your brash demeanor, people are very excited about you because you're an artist that seems to be giving back to multiple communities.

I only help people for totally selfish reasons. I just like doing it. I thought you were going to say they think I'm a money-grubbing whore!

I don't think they think you're any more money-grubbing than anybody else in the art world.

A lot of people seem to think that making money is a sin, but I don't, because I did without it for a long time. I just like doing stuff like this with money [points to the show]. It's so much better when you can pay your own bills, and you don't have to go around begging people for money.

O.K., so you're not being selfless...let's say you're promoting artists in your collection, then.

Well, it just turns out that way because the first way I promote them is to buy their art.

Tell me a little about the other artists you've selected for this current show.

These are all artists in Houston that I've been interested in for a long time. Some have just recently turned the corner in their work. Susie Rosmarin makes these hand-painted, geometric flash paintings. I always really liked her work but thought her career was held back by how labor intensive it was. I thought that if anyone could benefit from this computer stuff, it was her. These are the paintings I always envisioned she would do [new, large-scale inkjet prints on canvas] but once she got into it, she really went wild.

El Franco Lee is an artist who I love; he paints all these great, mythic scenes of African-American life. Years ago he started making prints of his paintings to sell extra copies, and when I was thinking about this show, I had this vision of showing those in stacks like at a supermarket. No originals here.

Paul Kremer and I were in an art collective. That's how I met Chris Bexar too. Paul's an Internet guy, and I pushed him to print on canvas. He has a great site called greatartinuglyrooms.tumblr.com. His first show was a bunch of those pictures printed on canvas. He wanted to do art but was only painting for a long time. I just always thought he was kind of a genius. Then suddenly, he just kind of went for it. He also does these Google search paintings that I showed and love. They sell really well.

Your career arc kind of reminds me of the recording industry: The way a rapper—at a certain point in their career—takes his knowledge and prestige and uses it as a way to produce the work of undiscovered talent.

Lil Wayne was famous for gathering young artistic talent around him in that way. I've always worked in music and always looked at that world and admire it. It's good for you to have relationships like that with young artists. That being said, all the artists in this show happen to be older than me!

Well, young art is supposedly “out” right now.

Only to dumb collectors! [laughs]. The great thing about young art is that you can buy it by the wheelbarrow.

It is rare when an artist who has “made it” puts their own money on the line in order to expose unknown artists. I’m surprised you don’t see it more.

Everything’s so fucked up right now. Art schools seem to fuck people up. There’s a bunch of people running around thinking that they bought a copy of the “rule book” at art school, but you just can’t do it like that. You really just have to stupefy people.