

What Is a Facebook 'Like,' Anyway?

"Listen up you worthless pieces of shit," artist Mark Flood says in his frank appraisal of social media's codependency with social justice.



Like the back room in a 1990s porn emporium that contains the *really* dirty stuff, the rear of Ever Gold [Projects] current exhibit contains a bit of salaciousness — in something of a restrained way. **["Mark Flood: Paintings from the War for Social Justice"](#)** largely takes on the domination of cultural discourse by Google and the notoriously prudish Facebook, and while there's a mock-up of a Facebook profile depicting a very large, very naked guy who bears more than a passing resemblance to Rush Limbaugh, there's also a big pile of placards reading "LIKE" on the floor, stacked like LPs in a record store.

It's as if Facebook likes, which have all the currency of U.S. dollars without any of the materiality of tens and twenties, suddenly acquired a physical presence — and were warehoused, like unwanted inventory in the garage of a hapless sap caught up in a pyramid scheme.

In actuality, all 1,000 likes are a static part of something Flood begun doing some time ago, asking gallery-goers to place them in front of his paintings. It took Facebook's method and brought it into the "real-world," to lay bare the harsh, are-you-hot-or-not reality we all subject ourselves to every time we say or post anything online.

Flood "had been doing the like paintings the last couple of years," says Andrew McClintock, Ever Gold's owner-director. "But people started stealing them. So we decided to show it as a variation of that installation piece, something non-interactive."

Granted, you don't want people stealing stuff that they might later sell. But would the frequently censored Texan artist, whose work is rooted in punk, really get all that mad about such thefts in this particular context? Or would the deed maybe have his tacit endorsement?

"Yeah," McClintock says, "sometimes it's part of the network, or the fabric of the experience."

Regarding the fat, naked FB profile — which is called *Richardson's Mark Flood Facebook Page 2016*, and which the censors in Palo Alto would remove in moments — McClintock says it was the "safest" of the series. Elsewhere in the gallery, viewers can see Zuckerberg's eerily beatific face morphed and warped, and a Google logo fragmented so severely that its constituent primary colors bleed and fade. It seems to say that the company dedicated to organizing the world's information is, in reality, little more than signal interference. And *Retracted Tweet* shows a lower-case *t* fading into nothingness, Gerhard Richter-style.

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The timing of this show is no coincidence. McClintock says Flood called it “one of the hardest shows he's worked on for a while” and that a lot of works were edited out or otherwise made palatable — not to satisfy the pearl clutchers, but to mesh better with the current moment. That Facebook will suspend your account for posting an image of a butt crack but, by denying that it's in any way a media company, allows such torrents of misinformation as to sway the results of a presidential election is what matters most here.



Still, the anger cuts several ways.

(*Ever Gold [Project:*

Some of the bolder, textual works make their intentions plain: “WEAPONIZE COLLEGE STUDENTS,” “DRINK MALE TEARS VOMIT MALE TEARS,” “DEAD CHILDREN,” and my personal favorite, “DRIVE BETA MALES OFF THE EMO CRED CLIFF.” This isn't just a stick poked at Silicon Valley's C-level suite. Flood expresses a certain irritation with the codependency activists have at using social media as a tool to obtain social justice, even as all signs point to it working against them. As he puts it in a press release he wrote himself, “Listen up you worthless pieces of shit, learn how to free yourself from the toxic messages and heal the hurt inside that's keeping you from giving yourself the self-love and self-acceptance you deserve.”

The best evidence is a mobile with lazy, pseudo-academic buzzwords like “tone-deaf” and “problematic” hanging from it. Who hasn't — especially in 2016 — seen their more politically engaged acquaintances post a link to something that outrages them, appending only a half-assed phrase about how that thing is “problematic” and giving that thing more undeserved attention? Donald Rumsfeld said you go to war with the army you have, but Mark Flood thinks that in the war for social justice, there may be a mutiny among the troops, who were always only mercenaries to begin with.

Mark Flood: Paintings from the War for Social Justice, through Dec. 22, at *Ever Gold [Projects]*, 1275 Minnesota St., Suite 105, sfaq.us/ever-gold-projects

Peter Lawrence Kane / Thu Dec 15th, 2016 4:55pm /



1000 Likes and ZERO FUCKS GIVEN [orange gutter] (Peter Lawrence Kane)