

Interview

Are You a Believer?: Mark Flood's Insider Art Fair

By Rachel Small – May 14, 2014



Coinciding with his solo show at Zach Feuer Gallery, artist Mark Flood has taken on a new role: “Mark Flood, Fairmonger” (his recent email signoff).

Following New York art fairs Armory, ADAA, Moving Image, AIPAD, VOLTA NY, Independent, Scope, Frieze, Pulse, NADA, Downtown, Select, Cutlog, Collective Design, Outsider, Affordable and a few more, Flood has organized the first Insider Art Fair. Geared towards insiders, of course. And it's all Flood's work—the press release is a mock countdown of artists to see at Insider, each coincidentally named Mark Flood, with different biographies. Leaving no doubt about what Flood believes intrigues insiders, a long table stacked with fake \$100 bills greets visitors at the Chelsea space Center548.

Like at any fair, there are halls of booths, except these are veiled with tattered black trash bag curtains; a peak behind them reveals mattresses and pillows on the floor. “It combines an art fair with a brothel,” says Flood. “Because both have tiny rooms... I'm not sure if this is saying all artists are prostitutes.” Flood's canvases with mutilated corporate logos and slogans like “Disgusting Rich People/Disgusting Poor People” hang on the walls. All the lights are off. A medley of Top 40 pop songs is the soundtrack for strippers posing on platforms and strutting down aisles. (We spotted one of them dragging one of Flood's paintings by a rope tied to her neck, swaying to the beat of Ke\$ha.)

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Stacked near the bathroom are canvases printed “young artists now fetching huge prices—mediocrities like Parker Ito, Lucien Smith, Artie Vierkant, Oscar Murillo, and Mark Flood.” The quote is from a Jerry Saltz article lampooning the art collector Stefan Simchowitz for promoting a money-driven art world. Based in Texas, Flood is known for his art’s blatant critiques of capitalism. Though the act of showing commercially makes him culpable, he partakes in gallery shows and projects like Insider with a whimsical hint of self-awareness.

“Art fairs are where all the art business happens these days. People are always complaining about this trend,” Flood writes over email. “I wanted to see what would happen if I embraced art fairs instead of resisting them. I made one for myself so I could experiment, like Thomas Edison or Luther Burbank.

Another press release from Zach Feuer is a poem by Flood titled “Art Fair Fever.” In Internet spelling and style (all lowercase; you is “u,” etcetera), it begins with “art fair fever/are u a believer?” and ends with “nobody knows where all the art goes,/nobody knows.”

“It’s the theme song for my film I’m working on, Art Fair Fever,” says Flood. “We’ll be filming scenes there all week. Visitors and my entourage will be playing the role of victims of Art Fair Fever, who can’t stop buying more and more contemporary art, even though art critics don’t approve.”

Once daily, the strippers gather and hoist a canvas that reads “Another Painting” up on a cord, making a piñata. They invite one fairgoer to attack it ruthlessly. Tuesday evening we witnessed a petite redhead taking out what seemed like a great deal of art fair-related anger on “Another Painting.” When the piñata split, a flurry of real \$1 bills rained down. Less self-conscious attendees dove to snatch up the spoils. The redhead grinned, grasping a fistful. We asked her if she had been to any of the previous weeks’ fairs. “No! It was completely mercenary,” she answered.

Flood admits parallel motives for the fair, hoping visitors leave with “Some of my art and more personal debt.” We left richer with exactly one Mark Flood piñata dollar. Pity it’s not signed.