
MAPEX

MARK FLOOD

WORDS & INTERVIEW BY BRENDAN FOWLER / PORTRAIT BY CAROLINE WRIGHT / IMAGES COURTESY THE ARTIST

Last summer we were transporting a car across the country on a slightly tight timeline and chose to spend our one free day with a friend, the artist Will Boone, in Houston, Texas. Will has since moved on to Philadelphia, but he spent his last two years in Houston working for an artist there named Mark Flood. We had never heard of Mark, or maybe didn't remember that we had, but Will was adamant that we meet him during our Houston touchdown, and that's nice, right? Friends of friends becoming friends? Will took us to Mark's studio, the site of easily thirty-plus years of constant production exploding into an old and entirely overgrown Houston two-story house which itself felt on the verge of exploding onto the quiet street in front of it. It was overwhelming and disorienting, a "Where am I/Whose entire life did I just trip into the middle of?" moment for sure, but the really nice kind that you only find yourself in halfway across the land among mostly strangers.

We didn't really even have time to process Mark's world until departing back to the road, at which point our impressions of him quickly progressed from, "Wow, he was a character, right?" to, "Definitely, those lace paintings were some of the most beautiful works I have seen in my life," and, "The text pieces were so good."

When we reached home base I looked to his massive web archive, *www.mflood.com*. The site covers what must be a nearly complete portion of his output from about 1972-2002 (the last time it happened to be updated). Of course, this, too, is initially overwhelming, but quickly reveals itself as a functional enough way to feel further into his oeuvre. It helps that works are cross-referenced and linked by about fifteen categories such as collage, lace paintings, texts and words, or advertising. He has made *so much stuff* and the ability to explore it from the relative calm of your own computer—albeit at way too tiny resolutions—makes for a more manageable mind blowing. It also makes clear at once that Mark Flood is the kind of person that *needs* to make art to process the world. Through his work you can see clearly the person coming of age in the Houston, Texas, born when he was: conflicts with the local oil economy, advertising, the 80's pop culture media onslaught. The stimuli of life in those years are filtered through the lessons of early punk, the further studies of hardcore punk, and the well-understood and dearly identified-with histories of art—fine to conceptual—and artists through the ages. You can see the dynamic output of someone *living* their art out of need, un-phased by a nearly total lack of acknowledgement from the greater "establishment art world." Oddly enough, though, just as I was finding out about someone I had never heard of before, so were a few other people who would in fact go on to play major roles in what everyone agrees seems to be Mark's much deserved "breakthrough." But even odder, perhaps, is that they, too came to Mark's work seemingly by chance. Mark's early 80's pre-industrial-cum-hardcore band, Culturcide, managed to make a mark on the international punk/damaged music scene of the day. They had a drum machine when no one else in the States did, then they got a live drummer but would still stop in the middle of a set to sing over actual records of Bruce Springsteen and other hits of the day. They confronted and confounded punks and "normaloids" alike, leaving behind a legacy that still sounds insane today. (ed note: their 1986 record, *Tacky Souvenirs of Pre-Revolutionary America*—which was put out of print for consisting of an album's worth of copyright infringements as Mark and company play noisy guitar and sing their own super bratty and hyper satirical lyrics over all the pop hits of the day—is absolutely worth tracking down by any means necessary) As such, Mark, who actually performed as Perry Webb in the band, appeared in Paul Rachman's 2006 documentary *American Hardcore* and it was this appearance that intrigued Peres Projects' director Blair Taylor to look into his art. Her findings prompted *Sack of Bones*, the group show that she and Ellen Langan co-curated around Mark in March of 2008. Taking place at the artist Terence Koh's Peres-backed Asia Song Society gallery in New York, *Sack of Bones* saw Mark surrounded by the works of an age-ranging group of similarly trouble-rousing but undeniably established artists like Dan Colen, Tara Delong, Bruce La Bruce, Agathe Snow, and Banks Violette among others. It was set up like something of an introduction to a brilliant long-lost sibling or comrade. Then, this summer, Mark was included in Alison Gingeras' massive curatorial outing, *Pretty Ugly*, which ran across both New York's Gavin Brown's Enterprise and Maccarone galleries and placed him alongside Charles Ray, Takashi Murakami, Elizabeth Peyton, Raymond Pettibon, Isa Genzken, Andy Warhol, Kristin Baker, Louise Bourgeois, the Chapman Brothers, John Currin, Nan Goldin, Eva Hesse, Martin Kippenberger, Paul McCarthy, Laura Owens, and staggering list of equally massive others. One of his collages, *Michael and E.T.*, from 1985 was even used as the image for the show's poster. This November, *Sack Of Bones* will open again, this time at Peres Projects' original Los Angeles space in Chinatown just three days before Mark Flood's first solo show for the gallery, *Entertainment Weakly*, christens their new Los Angeles location in Culver City, marking new and exciting moments for the gallery and Mark as well.

As you read the following interview with Mark Flood, recorded over the phone on August 25, 2008, Los Angeles to Houston, please note the following: Mark Flood speaks in a long but notably animated drawl, at times almost switching into characters to affect a word or a few. He is incredibly charming and earnest, a confidently realized southern weirdo that only an honest lifetime can create. You experience it with him in person, you hear it over the phone, you can feel it in his work and I hope that you can read it in the interview, which we are so incredibly honored to present to you below.

Brendan Fowler: Did you get into art stuff at a young age?
Mark Flood: Yeah. I guess my story is a little different from a lot of artists I know who came to art later in life because they thought art was something cool. As long as I can remember I was always the artist in the family and in school. I never felt like I *came* to it—it was just part of the package of being me. I started drawing when I was young—two or three—and my parents were like, "Well, put him in art class." They created a Frankenstein monster.

BF: Did you get into music stuff in your teen years?
MF: Yeah. I was always into art, but music I always had a thing for [too]. I remember The Beatles, I was a little kid then but my sister was all into it. I was really into the Rolling Stones, '60s music, Jimmy Hendrix. I was getting the older kids' records. Then I was getting into the weirder stuff in high school; I was the only one in my high school who was listening to Iggy and Roxy Music, Mott The Hoople, stuff like that. Then when I was in college we saw The Sex Pistols on *20/20*, a pretty early appearance, and me and my buddies went out and tried to find Sex Pistols records and stuff.

BF: Were you able to find them?
MF: We had interesting experiences. I remember a guy in a record store telling us that they had gotten one copy of the Pistols single and that it was the "worst garage band [they'd] ever heard," and just all this attitude. It's hard to recapture now just how weird they were. We had a friend in England who started bringing us stuff, so that was punk hitting Houston.

BF: I read that Culturcide began as an art project, as opposed to a bunch of kids starting a punk band.
MF: No, not really. To me it was like the punk rock thing just sort of opened up the possibility that you could even *go* onstage. That was really a real thing. I mean, I try to explain it to younger people sometimes: in 1983 there was a 24-hour-a-day Beatles radio station in Houston and the Beatles had already been broken up for years, you know? People worshiped music like that—Rick Wakeman, Emerson Lake and Palmer—you had to be this supernatural performer to even consider being a musician. And then when punk came out, the "anybody can do it" stuff, it was very inspiring. I tell you, I had *never* considered that I could be onstage, or do *anything* like that. And then I did and then I met a guy—Jim Crain—who knew how to make records, but to him the problem was money, so I said, "Well, I'll just go get money somewhere," and I borrowed money and we did the first single. You know, *art* is such a loaded word (laughs) I hate to apply it. I'm real involved with art, but I certainly wouldn't call it an "art project." It was definitely more exciting than reading about stuff in books. I mean, this was really happening. There was a club down the street from me where I started hanging out every night.

BF: What was it called?
MF: Rock Island. But actually, by the time I started making records I was much more into industrial music, like SPK and Throbbing Gristle, and that's kinda how me and that guy got together.

BF: I can hear that. So that was around '80?
MF: We started recording in '79.

BF: Did you go to art school?
MF: No. But, like I said, I was obsessed with art all during junior high and high school, but it was all developed in isolation, so by the time I got to college I took art classes but I was totally out of synch with everybody else. Making art was just this way I processed my emotions or tried to give my life meaning and everyone else was just kind of trying it out. (laughs) I remember being in this class where every single person is painting these abstract expressionist paintings, imitating the teacher, and I'm on this little balcony they had spray painting these dead birds (both laughs). So I was just kind of out of synch with them. There was another guy in there who was out of synch, too, and we were buddies. You know, it's just the classic story, but it makes a big difference when you come to art because it's something you think is *good*, rather than when you make art because you think you *are* art. It's not something that I do that is good, it's just something that I have to deal with.

BF: What were you studying in school?
MF: I was doing fine art, and then I dropped out and switched to business. Then I started making the record and just stopped going to classes. And also, you know a big deal that happened was I started writing to these people, I corresponded with Throbbing Gristle and Crass and Mark E. Smith from The Fall. Just a little bit, you know, but it was terribly exciting to be in Nowheresville and have a letter from Cosey Fanni Tutti in your mailbox. I just sort of lost interest in my life—I remember the last day I went to my accounting class, I kept thinking of this song by The Fall and I couldn't pay attention in class and I was thinking, "You know I really can't do this anymore." I just stopped going to my classes and of course I failed them all and was asked not to return.

BF: Then what did you do?
MF: I started getting horrible "real" jobs. I worked for Texaco, I worked for the school district.

BF: Did you work in a gas station for Texaco?
MF: No, I worked in an office. Office guy. Office slave. It was an amazing experience, though. 1916 building, it was like a Charles Dickens story. At break time you came out of your cubicle and they had a black woman in a uniform ring a school bell as she pushed a cart down the aisle and then when you heard the school bell you'd line up on a piece of tape and they'd bring the cart up to you and you would buy your donut and your coffee and go sit at your desk.

BF: No way.
MF: Way. Way! And there's like eight desks all staring at this blank wall in this room where the ceilings are seven feet tall and the boss sits behind you

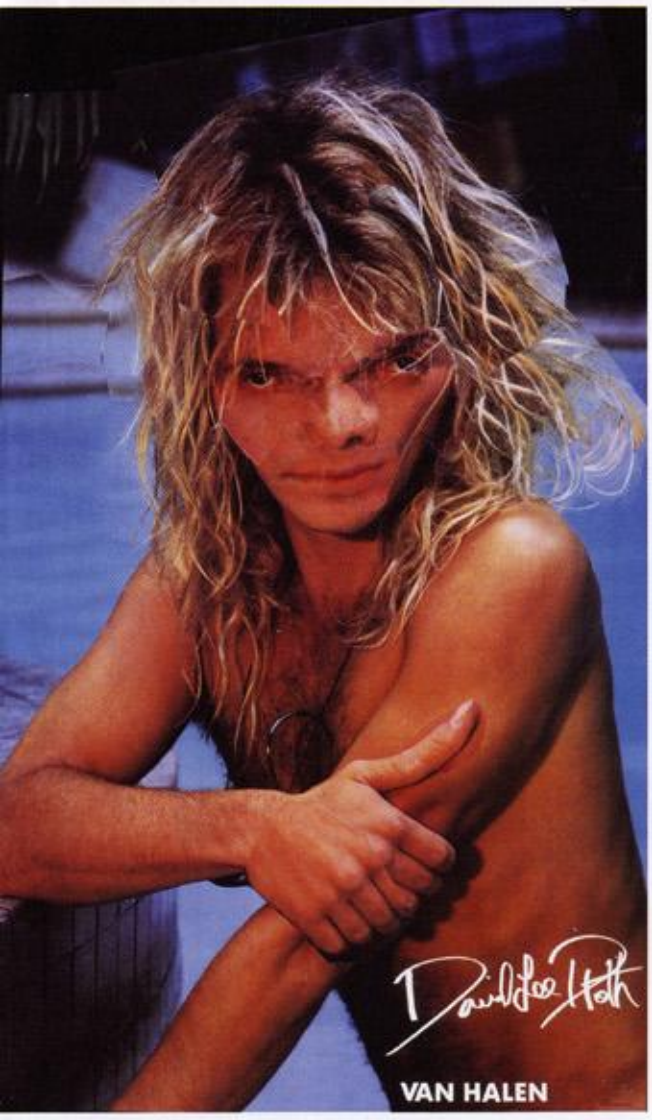
Michael and ET, 1985, collage, 22x22"

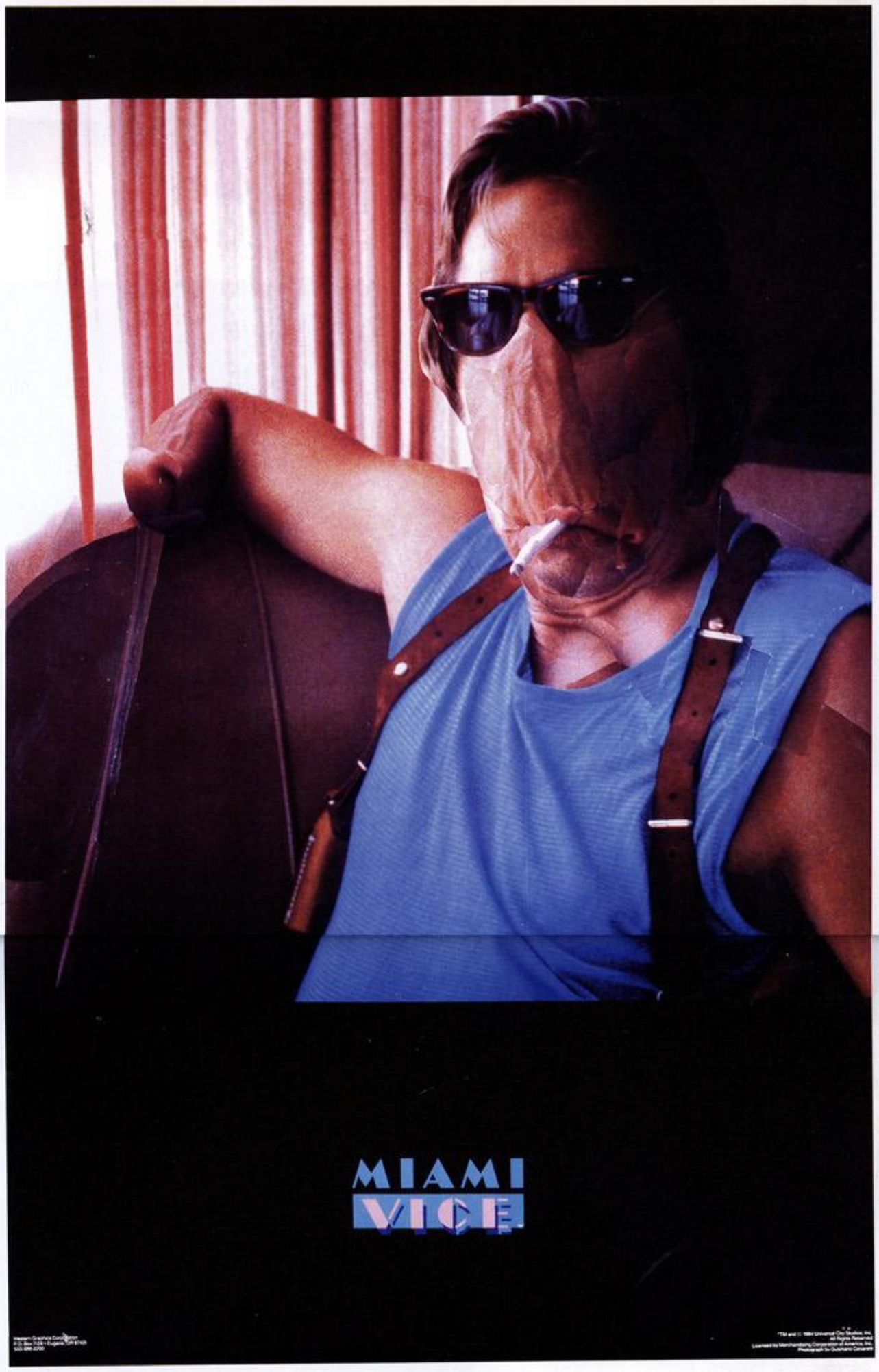
Julio Is Moving In, 1984, collage, 44x33"

(*opposite*)
David Lee, 1985, collage, 40x23"

Don, 1983, collage, 42x25"

(*following spread*)
Self-portrait, 1989, collage, 12x24"





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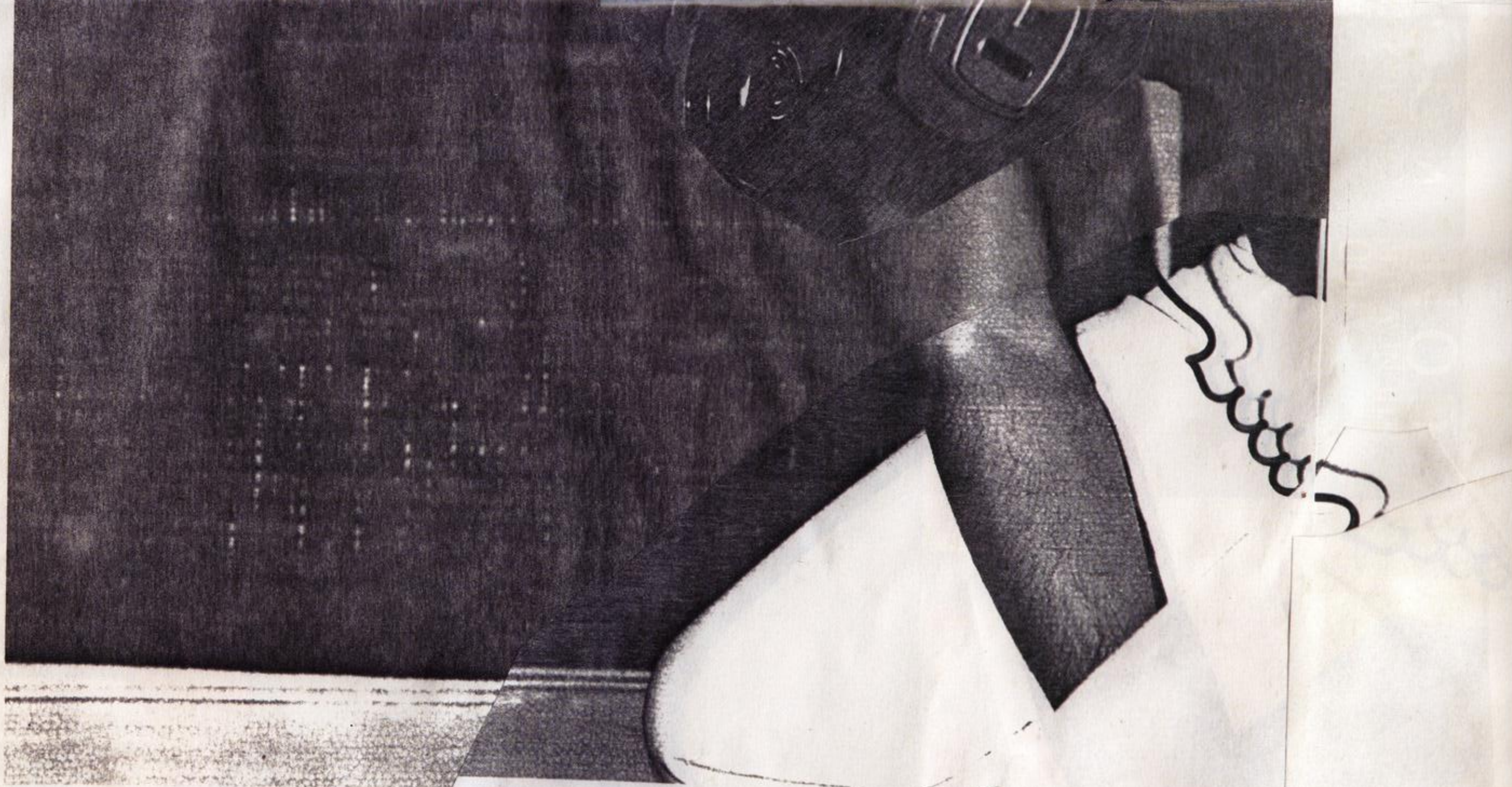
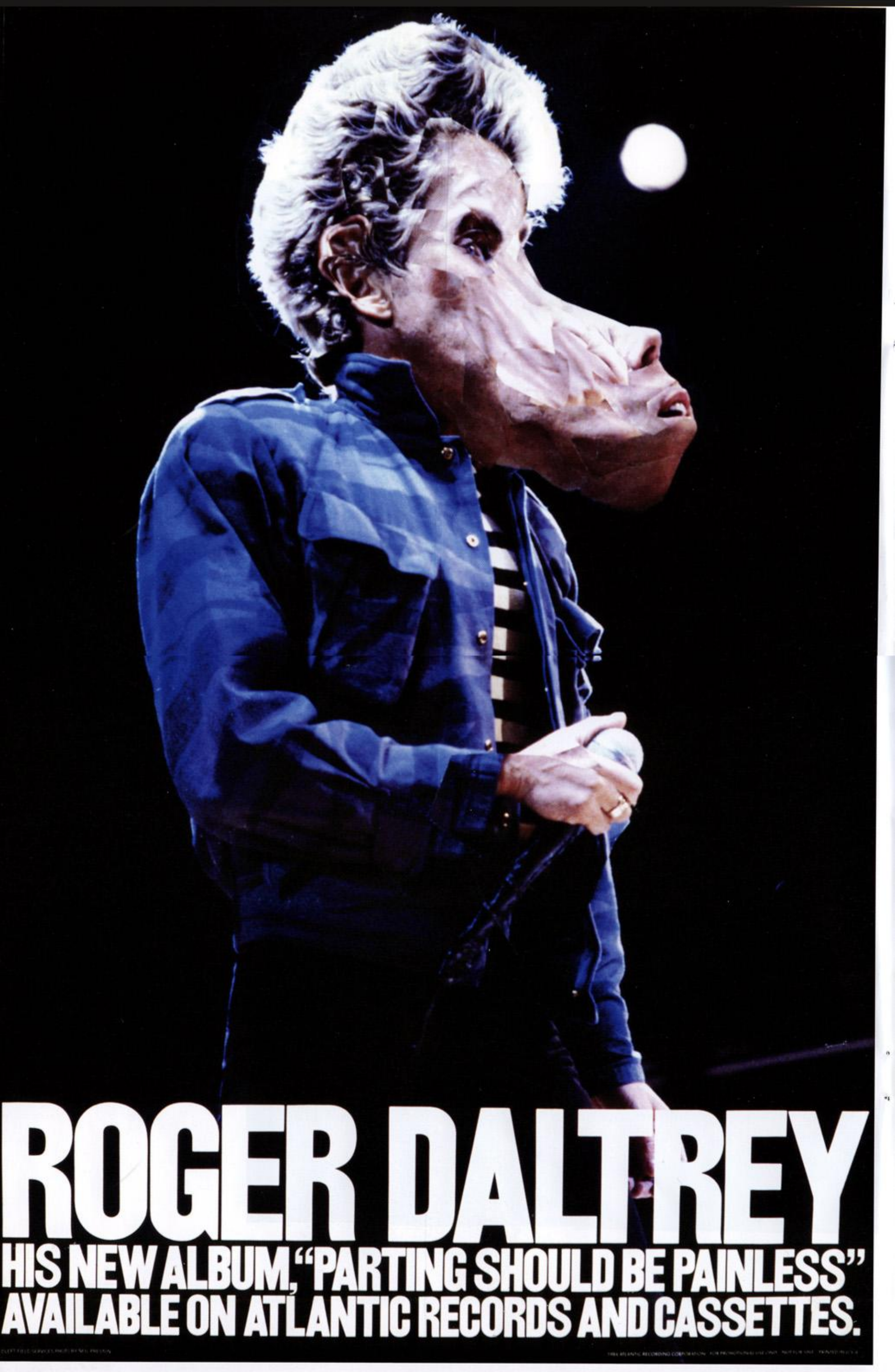



ROGER DALTREY
HIS NEW ALBUM, "PARTING SHOULD BE PAINLESS"
AVAILABLE ON ATLANTIC RECORDS AND CASSETTES.

MF: No. No, I don't remember doing that. Other bands were real bands and had drummers. (Brendan laughs) I didn't plan to play live shows, it just kind of happened. Jim Crain wanted to play live and so then we got a bass player and a guitar player and Jim handled the drum machines and the synthesizers and I did the vocals so it really wasn't my area. I don't really know what to say about it. We went out there, we performed, we played shows and I'm glad we did. I loved being onstage.

BF: Did you tour?

MF: Yeah, we toured a couple of times. We went to the west coast—after *Tacky Souvenirs* we played a festival in the Netherlands.

BF: Did people embrace it there?

MF: No, most people had never heard of us, and would never hear of us again; I'm not going to exaggerate it. What we were doing was very antagonistic. I mean, it was systematically antagonistic. But [then] Dan [Workman—Culturcide guitar player] brought this whole rock and roll thing into it and pretty soon you could see how *powerful* it [rock and roll] was. I'm into power as a creative thing and what makes something powerful, what you can do, and music-wise there's something about traditional sound structures that are powerful. That's like, even now, the blues, I'm kind of interested in it because there's something really powerful about that and how it connects to people. But anyways, we had a lot of tension between the noise and the rock and I was always trying to push the noise—we had a lot of stuff with tape loops and no instruments where we would just interact with the audience verbally and then we would actually sing and play over other people's records, which lead to *Tacky Souvenirs*, but we were doing that much earlier, definitely by 1983 we were playing other people's records onstage. We had a record player up there and we'd drop the needle on "Ebony and Ivory." But you know how it's the kind of thing where you go out and you *invoke* something, you set it up like it's a rock concert but when you're about halfway through it starts turning into this other weird thing.

BF: (laughs) Yeah.

MF: And—I don't know, that's my temperament. I like doing stuff like that.

BF: Mutating it.

MF: And interrogating it. And turning it back on itself. It's so powerful to be onstage and have the audience there. I like to stop it in its tracks and see what's going on.

BF: I was thinking about the progression through the records, from the more noise stuff, almost early industrial, to the playing over other people's records, to the record with live drums where it seems like you were almost playing the music that you were parodying before. Was it tongue in cheek?

MF: Well, we just did a lot of stuff, you know? Some moments are hotter than others. Some moments are better opportunities to *seize* where you can really deliver some kind of death blow to some situation (Brendan laughs). And other times you can just spend years fucking trying to figure out, "Well, what *do* I wanna do? What *is* goin' on?" I don't even know what tunes you were talking about but we've done a lot of stuff.

BF: Did the band *end* end, or did it just kind of stop happening?

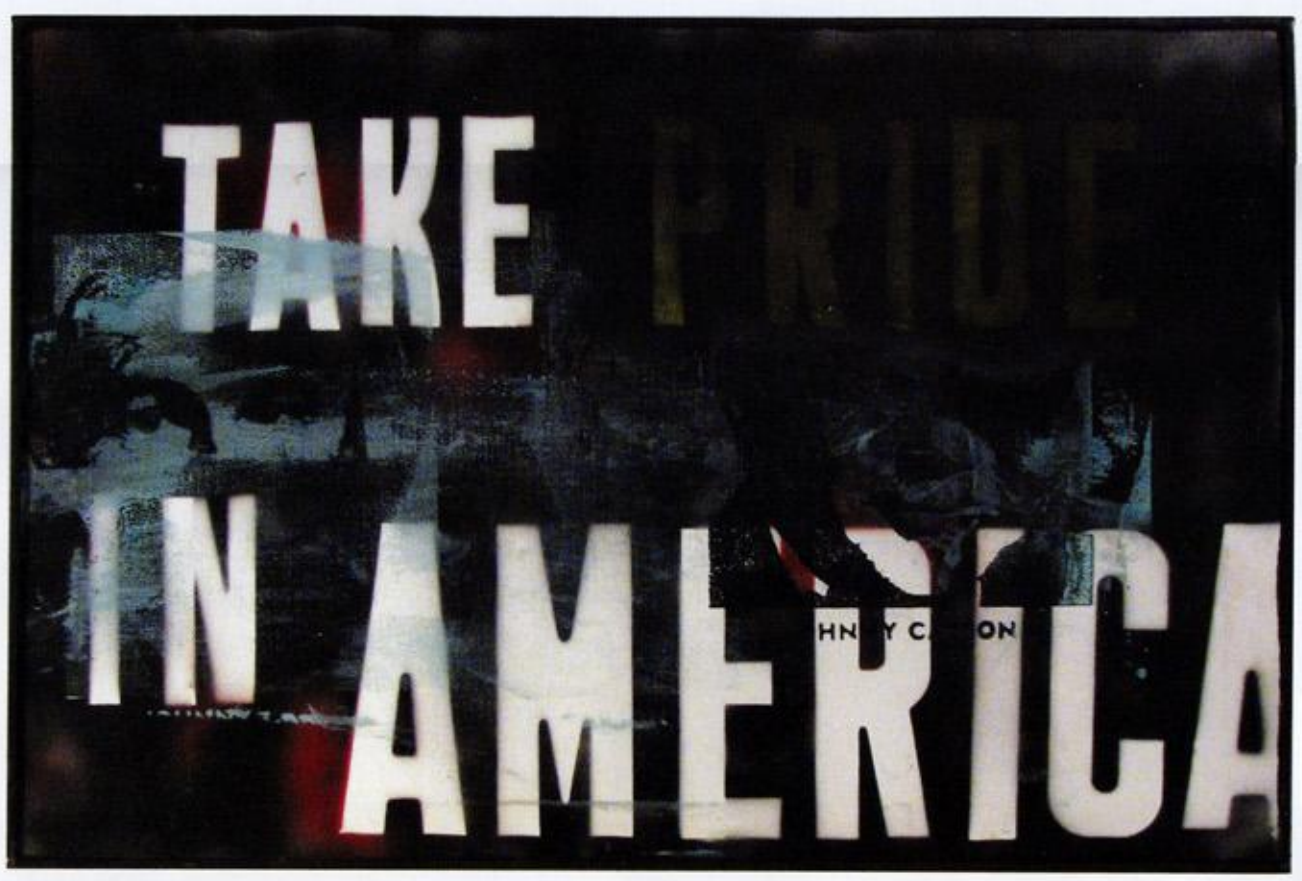
MF: We just kind of spasmed around, like, we were always sort of a "non-band." In fact, at the very beginning I can remember we talked about the fact that we weren't going to be "one of these bands that lived in their van and rehearsed all the time and had all this *crusty integrity* about, "We have to be a band, we have to piss in each others teacups." We all got real lives, we all got jobs, we're gonna rehearse once for every concert and do whatever we want. Who cares?" Now in retrospect, punk rock, people understand it, but to be in the underground when it's still under is—I don't know.

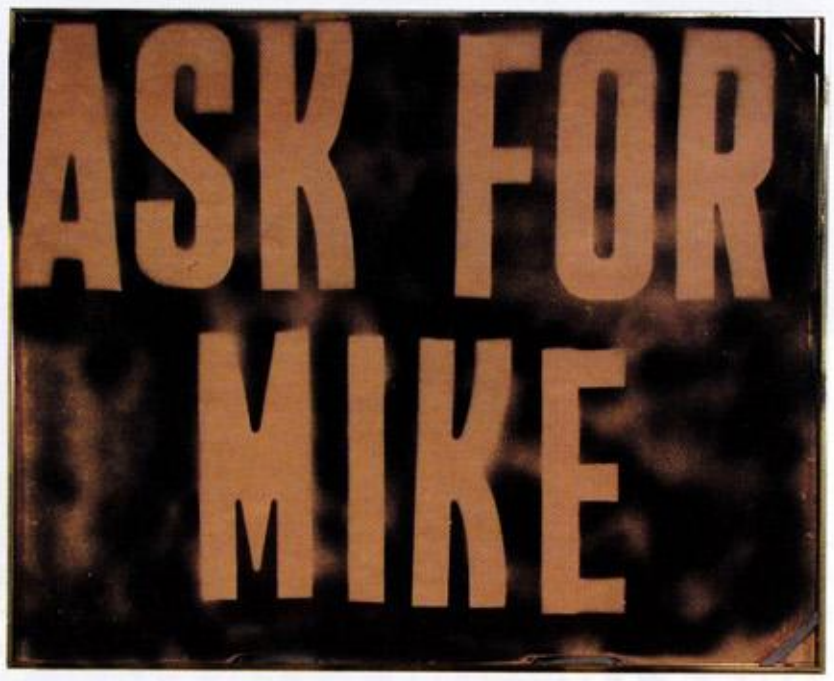
BF: Well it's like you guys were responding to, or rebelling against this thing that was already a rebelling against another thing. It got so *codified*, all the hardcore stuff got so intense. A band like Black Flag really paved the way for touring and DIY, but then they sort of made it too tight and made a whole other machine, which is what you were responding to, right?

MF: Well, yeah, and I don't wanna vilify Black Flag but it's always that way. The snow is always moving and you gotta keep moving and every generation has to re-invent the situation where they take a stand against whatever. People who are truly wanting to do something revolutionary are very few and far between and then that begs the question, "Then exactly what the fuck *do* you do?" To me, I always had problems with—and I wrote about it and had debates with people about it, but the west coast wanted to make the punk rock format their symbol for left-wing rebellion but I never bought that for a second because you could just see that this could go either way—already from the beginning you had *super* right-wing bands like Screwdriver using the exact same music—but that was the *Maximum Rock And Roll* [magazine] thing, and I respected those guys and I love 'em for polarizing music as much as they did. It was the greatest gift to culture that you had these nutty left-wing guys pushing the whole scene in this political direction which made it totally unacceptable to the mainstream. You couldn't even say the name of the bands. And eventually it was so rich because it stayed underground for so long. But I was always into, "What is the real format that causes trouble?" And here we can get right into something that is common to both my art and music: what I got into was the idea that you want to take the capitalist product that exists and *alter* it and shove it back. That's not my idea, Comte de Lautréamont is writing about it in the 1860's, talking about "plagiarism is necessary," and then you had the Situationists doing it with comic strips. To me that is still the most radical format.

BF: Comic strips?

MF: No, whatever it is. Whatever kind of mainstream product that everyone is already conditioned to, for example, Bruce Springsteen, "Dancing In The Dark," that was a big fucking song. People *revered* that guy and we took it and then we tweaked it and shoved it back. I can remember performing that song at a high school and they





Zigguraut, 1992, acrylic on joined canvases. 100x62"

TAKE-IN AMERICA, 1989, silkscreened acrylic on canvas, 20x36"

ASK FOR MIKE, 1988, spraypaint on cardboard with frame, 24x36"

(*opposite*)
Untitled, 1990, acrylic and spraypaint on four panels, dimensions variable

Classical, 1983, collage, 36x24"

Poster, 1983, collage, 36x24"

Sale, 1983, collage, 36x24"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BF: (laughs) Thinking of 'those years," punk historian people like talking about how hardcore suddenly "ended"—I know you saw that D.I.Y. magazine a lot later.
MF: Yeah.
BF: But did you feel like there was a sudden *end* to that era?
MF: Well, it seems like there's always a series of ends, you know? It's like the whole magic of time, every moment opens up these unique potentialities and you seize them or ignore them and before you know it, it's over. The mistake is to keep focusing on the moment that's already past, which is an easy mistake to make because once it's past you can understand it better. The hard thing is to keep tuned in to the present moment, especially when you get old. So, yeah, I watched a bunch of things end, but they're all so subtle, like, I remember there was a period in 1980 where we'd see people running around with mohawks and shit and we'd call them "stuck in '77," like, "Oh, look, he's stuck in '77." And then there came a moment when everything was all hardcore, everything was fast, so this whole other period was over. There's always different waves of different drugs, and a new crop of kids coming through, and that's just the way life is. It's like surfing, man, you gotta ride. Sometimes you go lay on the beach, and then you paddle back out. (both laugh).
BF: At which point did you decide that you were going to be a professional artist?
MF: There was a period where I was working on art, painting a painting a day, painting on top of other people's paintings that I bought in thrift stores, I had a thing going, but I decided to quit doing that and focus on doing these other, more conceptually driven shows. The first one, in 1989, was the show where I sold ad space on my paintings. I got a group together, I sold ad space, I promoted the show, we raised the money, we bought all the art supplies, I passed out the canvases to everybody, they painted on them, we silkscreened the ads on them and we had the show. But it was really different because most of my time was spent organizing it and doing PR and selling ads.
BF: Who was buying ads?
MF: Whoever wanted the cool crowds: discos, record stores, hair places. Local businesses. This sort of lead into me being more of a gallery artist. At some point a gallery did approach me about doing stuff but it was hard to figure out how to fit my art into a gallery. I'm just not—(pauses) the problem I have with the gallery context is that it tends to drain the *reality* out of the interaction between the person and the thing, just by its nature. I understand that better now than I did then. The gallery that approached me, Lynn Goode Gallery—Lynn Goode and Tim Crowley, big patrons of mine—wanted me to do a show. That started the gallery shows. And after doing so many shows in Houston, you want to show somewhere else. I started stalking dealers in New York and tried to do things in other places. I had a lot of delusions about it, a lot of ideas about it that I can see now didn't work. It's a hard gig, to try to place your art, as an artist. I was never very satisfied with it. I much prefer doing shows myself in places where nobody goes. But it's a compromise, it's hard. I hadn't had that many shows in galleries until I started doing the lace paintings. That was something that fit perfectly with the galleries because people liked them and bought them. They fit *so* perfectly that I barely needed the gallery anymore, it was just an opportunity for everybody to make money.
BF: Did you wind up selling a lot of lace paintings to people outside of galleries?
MF: Constantly. Yeah, that's what I live off of.
BF: Still, the lace paintings generate your income?
MF: Absolutely. But until the lace paintings, all of my other attempts be in commercial galleries with my art were never very successful. It was always a bad fit. I had shows in New York and other places, but I didn't like the prices, I didn't like the circumstances. As every struggling artist knows, it's a bitch and it grinds your soul down to a *nub*. And yet you have to do it, because otherwise you're doing your art and just sticking it in your attic. I never thought the lace paintings would be commercial, I had never had any commercial success, but I'd come to see that to keep doing new stuff you have to have a new technique. If you use old techniques you can only express old ideas. Sometimes it's real obvious—technical novelty—like when you saw Pollock dripping paint, that's the kind of paint that only came around in his era. Then other people are more subtle, like De Kooning whipping water into his paint with a blender, or even watching Jeff Elrod taping off his paintings, doing his computer stuff. Anyways, I thought I really needed to develop some new technical stuff and initially I was into color Xeroxes, laser prints, and having a bunch of laser prints on my paintings. But then I was like, "what do I put between these laser prints?" The only one who I thought really had any advice around that was Joseph Cornell, with his baked surfaces and his boxes. He's really a great resource and one of the most original artists that America has ever produced. But, anyways, I had a lot of experience in silkscreen and I saw a piece of lace at a thrift store and I bought it and experimented with it. It started as a background and it slowly took over. I was looking for something and then here it came. It took a long time; I would say I painted maybe twenty five of them before I really started understanding even how it worked and another twenty before I started tearing up the lace. Eventually I had a show of them and then it was like *Day of The Locust*, because people really liked them. But I did not anticipate *that*. Initially, I thought people would like my work, but (laughs) *god*, by the late '80s I already knew that they never would (both laugh).
BF: They wouldn't like it at the time, but—
MF: Yeah, exactly (laughs). It's amazing to me now, how people like my work from twenty years ago, but—
BF: You were in secluded bubble speaking to a zeitgeist that now maybe more people in positions of influence are interested in. It's like "Wait, he said it perfectly! Where was he, where were *we*? Why didn't we know about him?'
MF: Well, I don't want to get into that stuff, it's so egotistical. It's so personal with me, it's like "I am the art," I have to understand this. It's not like "I want to be an artist so I can hang out with cool people," it's like "No, I'm cursed with the art curse and I have to understand it cause it's the riddle of my own existence." (Brendan laughs) So I'm always trying to (takes on urgent tone) go to the edge,

Lake Catherine, 2002, acrylic on canvas, 66x48"

(*opposite*)
WART SCENE U.S.A., 2008, acrylic, spraypaint and bubblewrap on panel, 43x27". To the right: Spring Puddle, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 60x48". Photo by Susie Rosmarin

COMMIT SUICIDE - WIN EVERYDAY, 2008, spraypaint on coroplast sign, 68x42", right: ***KILL/SAVE SELF/ OTHERS***, 2008, spraypaint on coroplast sign, 47x47". Photo by Susie Rosmarin

picture of Michael Jackson, why does this Bruce Springsteen song hypnotize everyone? And then I'm trying to fuck with it, but it's my personal quest. It's really the young people now, who I think like my work and who *get* it, because I was driven to the edge by my emotional storms.

BF: (laughs) It seems like in a lot of ways you were operating in a literal bubble—maybe, just geographically—but more so I think that the art made by you and anyone involved with punk then, where there was an actual struggle against something, it was really paving the way and people see that now. But, also, it feels kind of historic now, "of a time," in the way that someone couldn't make the same records parodying Michael Jackson or Bruce Springsteen now—

MF: No, but they could do it. They could update it, you know. It's like you have to keep the battle fresh. Every day the machines are coming up with some new way to enslave the human race and every day the freedom fighters have to figure out some way to fight back. Every generation has to do it all over again. You have to do it with the technology that is of the *moment*. You can't do it with an Edison cylinder, you have to do it with your, whatever it is today, your *Blackberry*, I don't know. (Brendan laughs) If anything that I did is helpful to future generations or present generations, then that would be the most gratifying thing that I could want. I always did feel that all of my art is research into the ways the pictures and music control people. That's the whole power of art—it's not just art in museums and galleries, we live in this universe of *billions* and billions of pictures and they all have a social function; they're all part of this system for controlling people. From movies to TV to everything we look at. So to analyze how that works, and to analyze what we're actually looking at, I think is valuable. I researched that stuff for my own reasons, because I wanted to understand that. And if any of my little discoveries are useful to others, that's great.

BF: I know that you are also really into working with younger artists, employing them in your studio.

MF: I made a decision about six years ago—you know, I'm in twelve-step stuff and I got a lot out of sponsoring people and I said, "You know, I really should try to do this with art—I should reach out to younger artists." And then, once I had that intention I did start connecting with a bunch of younger artists and ones whose work I really thought was good and interesting and I just wanna say that it's been very gratifying, those kinds of bonds between generations. It can be difficult because it is hard to reach across generations, I'm sure it's difficult in both directions—but now sometimes I look back at my life and say, "Wow, I wasted so much time hanging out with people who aren't artists," cause now I like to hang out with other art people, mainly. I hope I've been helpful to them and they sure have been helpful to me.

BF: We met through Will Boone.

MF: Exactly, Will Boone, good example.

BF: And a great artist.

MF: Great artist, totally.

BF: At any point you're employing two or three people, right?

MF: Well, "employ" is sort of a big word. I always need helpers to help me in my diabolical schemes, yeah—well, let me put it another way, I pay $10 an hour to hang out with me, which is pretty tough duty sometimes.

BF: It's good to know what the rate is. (both laugh)

MF: It's quite a step up for them sometimes.

BF: Do you get a lot of "Man, why'd you stay in Houston?"

MF: Yeah, I constantly get that, and you know, it's a good question. I'm not sure I know the answer. I'm kind of a mentally ill type guy and, you know, I can hold it together to do stuff, but I felt that if I started being one of these tumbleweeds that moves around—I needed some variables to stay the same to do all this other crazy stuff. So I always tended to be a guy who stayed in Houston and who had a real job and had a car and who dressed normal and then people in the freak scenes always reacted to how normal I seemed. I remember being at that bar, Max Fish, in New York meeting this guy and the person introducing us says "Mark made the *Julio*," because that Julio Iglesias light box is there and this guy looked at me and said "I can't believe the guy who made the *Julio* would dress like you're dressed." I'm, like, "Well, figure it out, dude." (both laugh) So, anyways, I stayed in Houston. People were always like, "You should be in New York, come to New York." And I've been to New York, I go there, I've spent tons of time there, but I never was willing to live there. I just never saw how I could make my art in New York. I didn't think I could do what I wanted to do. And even back then it was like, "If you're not going to live in New York, you're not going to have an art career." And I was like, (laughs) "Well, I guess I'm not gonna have an art career then, cause I'm *not* fucking moving to New York." Also, I think a lot of people leave town to get away from their parents and I just told my parents, "I'm away from you now," so I didn't have to leave town.

BF: (laughs) You created the space.

MF: I created that space.

BF: Are you still not communicating with them?

MF: I do now, but there was a twenty year lull.

BF: I guess Houston is big enough that you can find the distance.

MF: Hey, you can find it in an apartment if you did it right.

BF: (laughing) One thing that I wanted to ask you about, just because it is always interesting to hear any stories about the place, but you had a show with Colin de Land at American Fine Arts, right?

MF: Not with Colin. I showed Colin the light boxes of the celebrity mutilation pieces, and actually, of all the dealers I stalked he was by far the nicest and most responsive. But it was a bad time to be stalking dealers in the '80s and he wanted a hard situation. Then later, in '04, I had a show there but it was after Collin had passed away and Danny McDonald was running the gallery and, so (pauses)—anyway, so we did lace paintings and the collages in the back.

BF: So it was starting to wind down there.

MF: The gallery was already closing, it was one of their last shows. But that's perfect. That's not a problem, it's a solution. To have shows with galleries that are closing down is perfect. (Brendan laughs) It's just the way it is, I mean, I loved that show. God, I'm grateful—I gave Danny the Michael Jackson collage! I feel so grateful for all the people who've supported me, cause there's been a steady string of them and I never could have done any of the shit I've done without these supporters. Someone paid for me to put out *Tacky Souvenirs*. I mean, a guy, George Shea—why not say his name—gave me twelve *thousand* dollars in 1986 to put out that album. Believe me, that was a pretty tall order.

BF: That's a ton of money, especially for the time.

MF: That's a ton of money, and it was *Tacky Souvenirs*, an album that saw engineers running out of recording studios and 1/3 of the band quit (both laugh), and then there were the audience reactions. So it was amazing, and I guess I tell that story to honor that guy and also to say, if you're open and go out to find support, you can find support for very odd things.

BF: And speaking of support into this day, and looking forward to the show you are about to have at Peres Projects in LA, the images of the new work that you made during your residence in Marfa looks a lot like some of the work that you had been making even before the lace paintings. It is kind of a revisiting?

MF: It's been called the "Neo Hateful Work" because I started doing pretty much just lace paintings in 2000, and so I called all the previous work the "Hateful Years" (laughs).

BF: During that time when you were working on *just* the lace paintings, was it that you were suddenly very content? It's not like you said "I'm just going to make these things that sell."

MF: No, not at all. I never thought they would sell, and when they did sell I tried to seize that opportunity. But please understand: the lace paintings, they come 100% out of Dave Hickey and his essays on beauty in which he makes the point that if you're involved with an art bureaucracy you can make ugly-ass art because the art bureaucracy will make an audience look at it like a mom makes a son swallow a spoon full of castor oil. But if you're not part of that system, then you make *beautiful* stuff to attract your own audience. That's Dave Hickey, he's the greatest. When I read that, I realized that even though I *hated* the fucking art system with a purple boner, and I was sick to fucking death of all these *grant* givers and organizations, and even museums, I realized that I was playing their fucking game because I was making ugly art. So I was like, "What is beauty? What does that even mean?" I became open to it, whatever the hell it is, and the next moment I'm making the most beautiful fucking paintings anyone's ever seen (laughs). And you know, I'm making a beautiful painting so I can say "fuck you" to the contemporary art museum, and "fuck you" to non-profits who won't give me a grant. And now I don't need their money, I make these paintings and people walk in off the street who've never even thought about art and they're like, "That's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, I wanna buy it." (pauses) It was *fantastic*! (Brendan laughs) It was a great experience. You know, I didn't really expect it to be like that, but I just became intellectually engaged by the whole issue. And part of me, you can see, I'm very antagonistic around a lot of the art world stuff and this seemed to be a way out of it. It's been such a *great* way out of it that I've been able to just leave that whole world behind. I sell much more of those paintings myself just to people than any gallery does but I'm no genius. At a certain point—I did them for eight years and my dad says, (in gruff, cynical voice) "Well, is it just like you're grinding out sausages?" And I said, "No (laughs), it's fucking *fascinating*." The whole way that the technique works is amazing—it's somewhat amazing to me how severely those paintings were attacked.

BF: Were they really so maligned?

MF: Well, yeah, (laughing) and the one I really think is funny is when people go "Well, he just calculatedly came up with a style that would *sell*. What a sell out!" And it's, like, (laughing) dude, I've been trying my whole life to figure out how to make a fucking living off my art, if it was so *easy*, like, "I'm just gonna come up with the *right thing*," it's like, well that's what everybody's trying to do! Get in line! If it *was* so easy there'd be a million people selling out. Get in fucking line. Trying to figure out how to sell out, yeah, we're all doing that! Most of the people who are in line, trying to sell out, are working at fucking Starbucks. That's the best way *they* can figure. But, anyways, after eight years I've made a million different paintings and I was like, "They're so big and heavy, I want to paint on corrugated plastic." You know, I just want to paint hateful slogans.

BF: So that's the Neo Hate stuff?

MF: Well, I don't know if I *really* wanna call it that, but yeah. I've just been back on this other thing. I'm pretty good at doing what I want. I don't really care what people think very much. I mean, I have my own problems, but I don't have problems that other artists have, like, "Am—am I *really* an artist?" I don't have problems like that. I have a pretty good grasp of my creative instrument and I do what I want. I feel it coming on and I listen. I'll stop everything and go do "this" even if it doesn't make any sense because I can tell that "this" is what I *really wanna* do. And it's worked out. So many times when you're doing something it's "wrong," it doesn't fit in, but you have to do it right then cause it's the moment. People don't wanna under*stand*, but you just have to deal with that.

The Cygnets, 2002, acrylic on canvas, 59 x 64"