

METAL



Having found in Peres Projects a gallery he feels comfortable with when exhibiting his artwork without the impact that “evil architects who hate art,” as he explains, Mark Flood now presents his new exhibition, *Battlefields*, at the gallery in Milan. Since he began making silhouettes of monstrous human bodies in the late 1980s and after showing through painting a representation of the struggles going on in his country, the United States, the artist has not abandoned one of his central subjects, the pervasive symbology of American consumer culture. We speak to the artist about his new exhibition open until February 17, his early work, and how his perception of art has changed.

Through the distortion of icons, the revisiting of symbols and the critique of contemporary culture by appropriating its visual language, Mark Flood has carved out a well-deserved place on the international art scene. Championing his own personal style, the Houston-born artist is now presenting for the first time at Peres Projects gallery in Milan. You can visit the *Battlefields* exhibition until February 17, 2023.

You are making your debut at the Peres Projects gallery in Milan with your exhibition *Battlefields*, open until February 17. How do you feel and what does this mean for you?

I haven't done a Peres Projects show in a while, and never in Milan. I was delighted because these guys do it right. They wanted my newest paintings, plus a couple from 2018, and that was good for me. The gallery is unusually beautiful and special and they know how to hang my work. I told them a long time ago, just pretend

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I'm dead and you represent my estate.

However, your relationship with the gallery goes back years. This is your eighth solo exhibition with Peres Projects. What would you highlight about this gallery, what makes it different from the others?

It seems to be about 500 years old and has arches and domes that are beautifully decorated with ancient murals. Most of the galleries I show at were designed yesterday by evil architects who hate art and artists with a deep and abiding passion. So this was a nice change of pace.

Your exhibition career began in the 1980s, and since then you've explored monstrous silhouettes of the human body as a vehicle for significance. What comes to your mind when you look back and think about your first works as an artist?

I tried imitating Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings in my teen years. Those have sentimental value for me, but they're not good. The earliest paintings of mine that I still enjoy were made about LSD trips. Some of these try to recapture the trips and some of them were made while I was on the trips. When I look at them, I think about good times and my friends from those days, some of whom are no longer with us.



Since your beginnings, the pervasive symbology of American consumer culture has been one of the fundamental axes of your creative vision. Do you think art has the ability to change the world? That was always an important question for me. Not because I wanted to change the world, but because I wanted to be more powerful. I was stuck with being an artist from my earliest days. I think it's obvious that images play an important role in maintaining all social systems. For better and for worse.

I am very interested in how you render an American flag blurred to question the viability of the American dream.

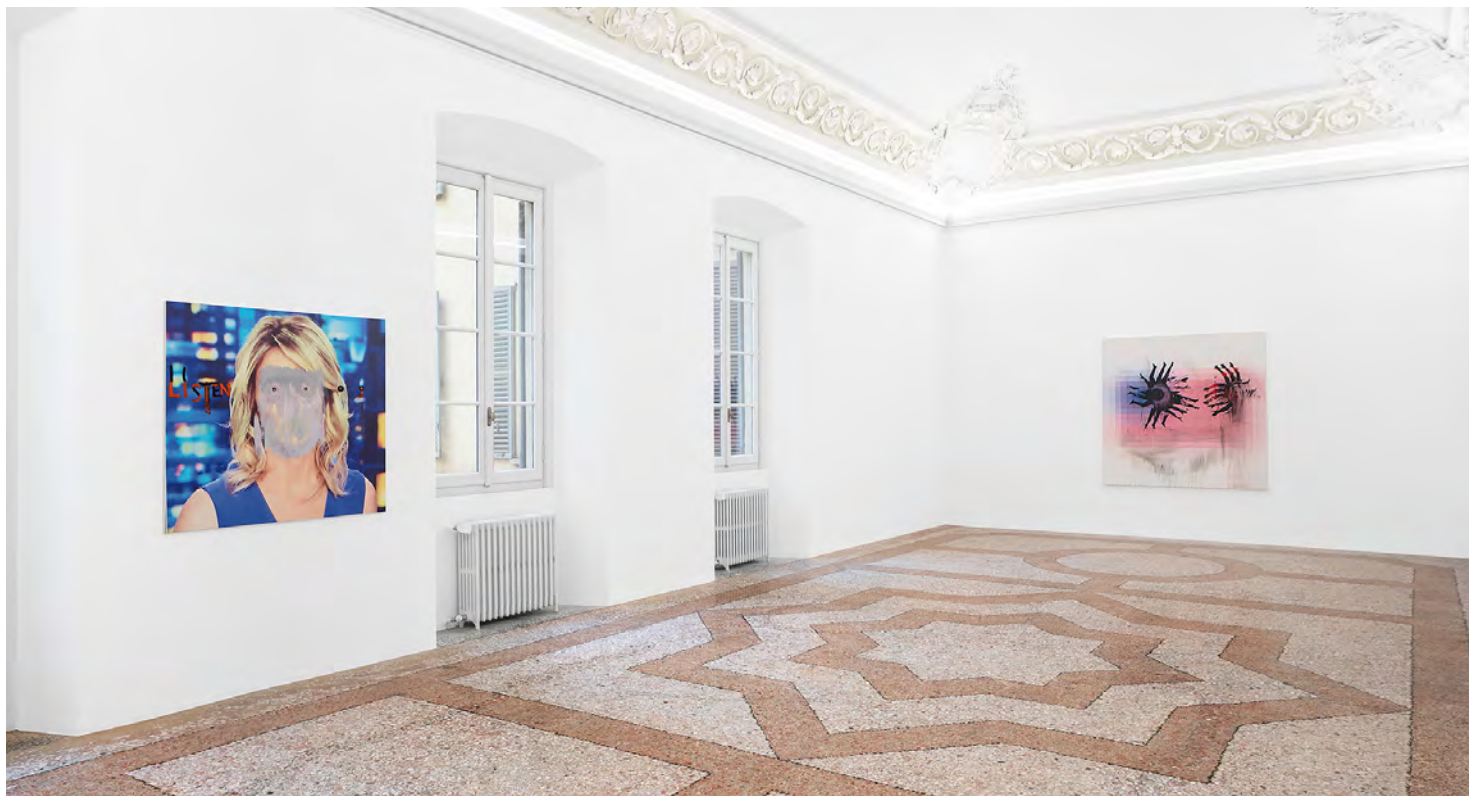
I work with the US flag because I think it still has a lot of resonance, even in the art world. I think

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about Jasper Johns's flag paintings all the time, and what an impact they made. Especially Triple Flag, which was the first. He says he saw it in a dream, which I think is remarkable, especially given how it influenced subsequent events. It's an oddly direct link between Surrealism and Pop. I'm not interested in questioning the viability of the American Dream. It's just a side effect of experimenting with distortions of the icon, to see what feelings and ideations are experienced by viewers.

In your new exhibition, *Battlefields*, you return to the motif of clustered hands explored in earlier paintings. Were you clear about what you wanted to represent, or is it the result of an instinctive process? How long have you been working on this project?

They're not just hands, but the whole human body. Maybe the hands are the most expressive parts. I started making silhouettes of monstrous human bodies in the late 1980s. I was influenced by the writings of Rene Girard, especially *Violence and the Sacred*. If you want the play-by-play, there's a book, Mark Flood in the 1990s. The *Battlefield Paintings* put that kind of imagery in the context of the pixelated US flags. They are, for me anyway, a representation of the struggles going on in my country.



In one of your paintings, *Listen* (2017), you intervene in an existing snapshot of a CNN news anchor, who is framed as though seated for a portrait. Could you tell us more about this artwork?

I love the way the media's talking heads are presented, and how the format contributes to their being perceived as authority figures. When I print out the talking heads onto canvas, the challenge becomes what I can add with a paintbrush, to make a statement about them. I usually try emphasising the eyes in various ways.

Has your perception of art changed since you first entered this world?

It's always changing.

Words

David Alarcón