

ARTnews

The Diary of Mark Flood, Part Four: Opening Night

BY MARK FLOOD - July 15, 2016



Editor's Note: This is the final installment in a multipart series about Mark Flood's experience organizing his first museum survey. You can read the other parts [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#). The diary is slightly backdated because, as mentioned, he was busy organizing his first museum survey. "Mark Flood: Gratest Hits" opened April 29 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and will run until August 7.

Thursday, April 28, 2016

1.

I heard a rumor. One of the guests who was at my dinner last night, a local, was going to buy a huge lace painting out of my CAMH show.

I said, "I'll believe it when the check clears."

I know better. I've spent my life here and the general rule is, People in Houston don't buy art. There are galleries, and lots of artists, and tons of art. There are people who, if you ask them just right, might say they are collectors. But it's all wishful thinking. There's no art money flowing here. Our scene is like a pretty sex doll. It has all the parts and you can do whatever you want with it. But it's not real. There's no money in it. You bring

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your own lube, because it doesn't make its own.

2.

My ignorant non-art buddies think having a museum show is some kind of cash shower, like hitting a Vegas jackpot. I gently disillusion them. The show is completely upside down for me financially. Typically, one's galleries step in and pay the costs because museums always act like they're broke. With this show, that's not necessary. My show is relatively cheap, because I own almost all the work. There's no shipping, no couriers. The benefit is that this local museum show might elevate my erratic career in New York and Europe. It also might signal to other museums that I'm not a rabid beast.

3.

The local paper wants to interview me and photograph me. I said no. I'm sure the staff has all changed by now, but I don't care. I'm holding onto grudges for things that rag wrote about me 30 years ago. Fuck them. I should be big about this, but I'm not. I'm as petty as a prison yard. They molested my career when I was young and vulnerable. Now I'm all grown up, and they want a date. Letting them photograph me would be like inviting a vampire over the threshold.

4.

I had lunch with Will Boone, another Houston escapee. He told me about a dream he had. There was a giant Cornell box and he was inside, under the glass. We both get a lot out of Joseph Cornell. It reminded me how I always wanted to go behind the owl in a Cornell owl box. To go further, deeper into the magical space. Backstage.

5.

I guess we should talk about some of these paintings while we still can...



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MIDCAREER LOSER

In 1999, I found out I wasn't going to be able to kill myself, and that put me in the embarrassing situation of having to keep living. I had to go to 12-step meetings, and get sober, and change my lifestyle.

I couldn't kill myself, but I could kill my career. I started committing career suicide every time I picked up a paintbrush.

It didn't seem to matter much since my stillborn career was already dead and always had been.

I lived in a world of fantasy. In that world, my twin brother Clark took the rejected, unstretched lace paintings and wrote terrible truths on them.

Clark was the writer in the family.



ALLEGED ARTISTS, BLIND DEALERS, GUTLESS COLLECTORS, WHORE MUSEUMS...

This is probably the most popular text painting I've ever made. When it was first shown, the installation shot was reposted thousands of times.

I once characterized it as an amusing look at the plight of the artist. Yet for critics with no sense of humor, it's the prime example of my negativity. It's typical of my invective. I'm angry, harshly critical, and I seem to hate everything! I'm lashing out, and most of all, I'm spewing my bile...

Oh God, the spewed bile! It's all over everything, and it doesn't wash out!

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For the record, I love museums, collectors, dealers and artists. Where would we be without each other? This work is a portrait of our clubby little community, wherein we can all recognize each other, and ourselves, and chuckle. Who hasn't judged that an artist's work isn't really art at all? Doesn't every artist resent some dealer who didn't appreciate their obvious genius? Doesn't every dealer wince at some collector who sheepishly follows the collector-herd? What museum doesn't have its fundraising fuck-hole front and center, puffy and wiggling for the corporate wad? It's funny. Most people don't take it personally because they always assume I'm talking about somebody else.

“Mexico City”



In the late '90s I hurt my back and couldn't get around for six months. I crawled through my squalid studio like a giant bug, gobbling pain killers. I would look out my second-floor window at the lawn below, wondering if I would ever walk across it again. I was in no shape to whip out lots of paintings, as I usually did. But I had to do something. So I decided to paint some small, labor-intensive paintings that would take weeks or months.

I visited Mexico City a lot as a kid. I made this fantasy memory of it so I could endlessly paint and repaint the architecture with experimental techniques. Mexico City is filled with fantasy architecture. In those days I created a lot of monsters out of silhouettes of human body parts. This orb made of arms was so popular that I had a small silkscreen of it made for printing on T-shirts. I used it to print the monster on this painting.

My ideas about the visual forms of monsters come from the work of René Girard. After a small community has had its values turned upside down by pervasive violence, they scapegoat some individual, and blame him or her for everything. They collectively murder this victim, and everything settles down again into some new social order. The victim is remembered as a monster that almost destroyed the community. I silkscreened my monster up in the sky like a solar disc. Somewhere behind Huitzilopochtli, the sun god worshipped by the Aztecs of Tenochtitlan, there was a human victim.