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The Diary of Mark Flood, Part One: Gone to Texas

BY MARK FLOOD - May 11, 2016



Editor's Note: This is the first installment in a multipart series about Mark Flood's experience organizing his first museum survey. The diary is slightly backdated because, as mentioned, he was busy organizing his first museum survey. "Mark Flood: Gratest Hits" is on view now at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and will run until August 7.

It looks like I'm going to be doing a diary-like thing for ARTnews, promoting my show "Gratest Hits" at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

Good. I like publicity. I like to feel that somebody somewhere is paying attention. I never look too close at who that might be, because it's usually someone unexpected, and somehow disappointing, like a 75-year-old wannabe who does watercolors and wants some feedback, instead of critics, or collectors, or Beyoncé.

But whatever.

They say connoisseurship is going extinct, because the collectors of today are too busy managing their hedge funds to learn anything about art. They just call their consultants and order off the menu. So it might be a good idea to be very famous, so your name is printed in big bold letters on that menu.

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I like to sell art, I like to pay the bills. I've never had any creative problems, but I've had just about every money problem.

I'm not too worried about looking like a sellout whore, even though that's arguably what I am, because I've got so many decades of certified poverty on my résumé. Plus my dubious Punk Rock provenance, which continues somehow to signal Integrity in the art world.

Nobody ever criticizes me like the voices in my head, anyway.

CAMH is my hometown museum, and we have a rich and storied history together, even though I've never had a show there.

I wrote a column that became a book called Clerk Fluid, and I published that book, and it has several passages that trashed the CAMH. I called it the CUM, the Center for Useless Mediocrity. I said the awkward futuristic building was designed to form an image of an awkward futuristic gun, which was to suggest local artists commit suicide. I said it wasn't a museum because all the muses had long since been evicted.

Bill Arning is the current director of CAMH, and the curator of my show at CAMH. Bill Arning and I went to a coffee shop, and he told me later he was surprised I even agreed to meet.

The idea of Mark Flood doing a show at CAMH was so shocking and perverse I couldn't say no.

We negotiated. I wanted no interior walls because I think that's the only way the CAMH's difficult space can work. Also, it says in our agreement that they can't do any publicity that embarrasses me.

I wanted to make sure Bill was respected by the CAMH board, and that the board knew all about me and Clerk Fluid. Otherwise, I was afraid someone with power might suddenly pop up like a jack-in-the-box and tell me "no" about something.

Maybe that's why the head of the board, JB, gave me this great pep talk at a cocktail party at his house. He assured me that everyone was behind the show, and talked about how great the Bill Arning era was.

JB said that what the board wanted from me was the "bleeding cutting edge." That's an expression I'd never heard before, but which I liked.

Bleeding cutting edge. I wasn't sure exactly what that meant, but it was quite a mandate!

I made a BLEEDING CUTTING EDGE painting for the show...It has an arrow that points to the rest of the show.

So things were good with Bill and with the board, and I made another decision to keep things simple. I decided I would only use paintings that I still owned in the show. Usually nobody buys the ones I like anyway. This way, I wouldn't have pesky lenders telling me what I could and couldn't do with my own art.

So Bill and I came up with the concept of "Greatest Hits," which was a show that was not quite a retrospective, but had work from various periods. It had paintings that had caused some kind of sensation, and also any work that was Great in size, because I think enormous paintings are what look best in that CAMH space.

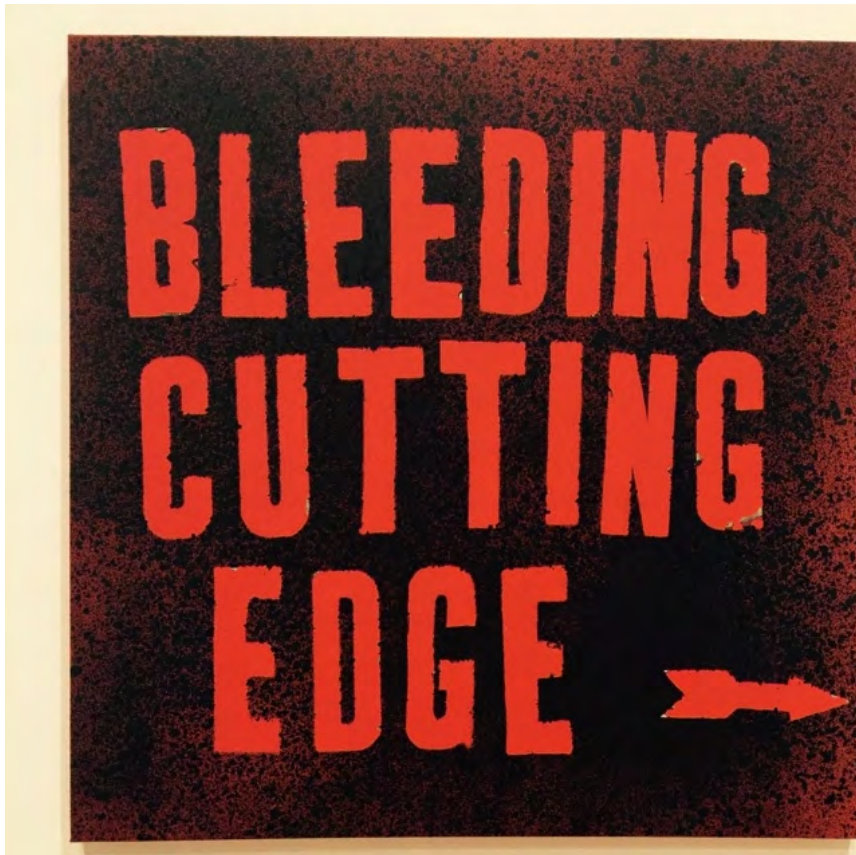
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I also wanted to misspell the title Gratest Hits, because I like to grate on everyone's nerves.

Bill and I made a tentative list of works, and then we worked out a tentative placement of the works, in a scale model of the CAMH my assistants built, in one of my studios.

Then, in January 2016, I opened a show called "The Future is Ow" at Marlborough Chelsea. I had organized this show and it consisted almost entirely of large printed paintings by myself and several friends.

I've always liked bracketing giant paintings together to make walls, partitions, and even rooms. Looking back, I think the idea of this seeped into my mind from prolonged exposure to the work of Richard Jackson, an edgy L.A. artist who had a presence at the Menil Collection in Houston, where I worked for 18 years.



He did a show there in the '80s where he used small stretched canvases like bricks, and paint like mortar, to build freestanding rooms inside the gallery. I guess I never got over it.

Anyway, in "The Future Is Ow," I took my room building further than I ever had, building two large rooms out of printed paintings, and furnishing them, and decorating their interiors with drawings and small prints and photos by the artists.

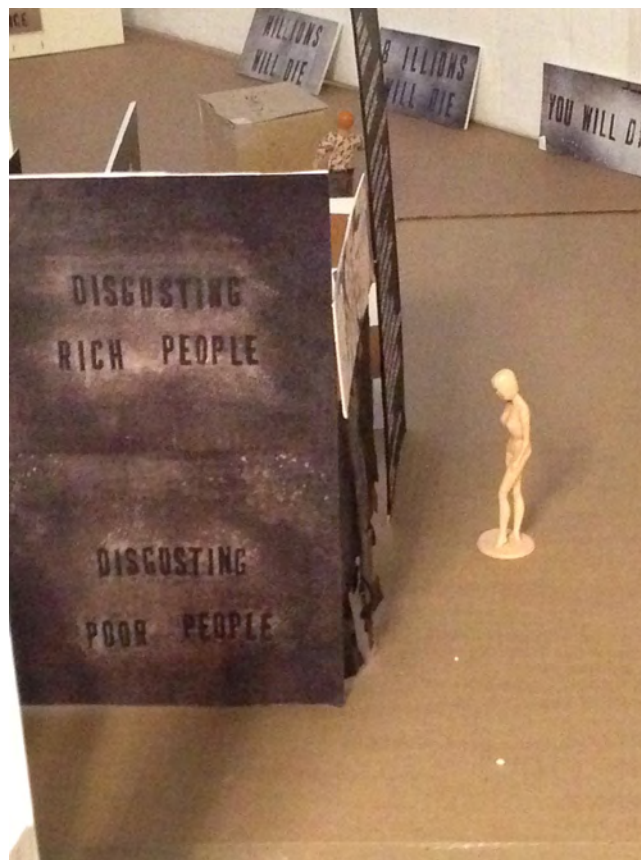
Everyone liked it, especially me.

So when I got back to Houston, I started playing in my CAMH model and soon came up with a plan where almost all the giant paintings were bracketed together. They formed a big zigzagging wall of paintings. The CAMH gallery is a trapezoid, a giant stretched-out diamond, and my wall marched across it from one end to the other, dividing it into two long irregular spaces. When you enter the CAMH you are confronted by this huge colorful wall blocking your path, but there is a central opening through which you can walk into...the other

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space...

To give everyone some reason to go from A to B, I decided I would put some Flood memorabilia from the '80s and '90s all over the back walls, along with a handful of older, smaller paintings. I have this theory that everyone in contemporary audiences really wants to be backstage, and I'm going to let them. Now they can see giant artworks onstage in my "Gratest Hits" show, and then go behind them, into a mysterious back room of art/museum. And there, they can go just as deep as they want, down a great big rabbit hole of Mark Flood memorabilia.



So that's the plan now, and it's almost time to start installation. And I'm going to keep a diary of my innermost thoughts and feelings, like a shy teenage girl. I'm going to write it with precise slanted penmanship, in a tiny pink book with gold trim and a pink ribbon, and it will be intensely private and personal, and if some bully gets ahold of it and starts laughing and reading it out loud to his buddies, I'm going to turn red and start crying, and chase him around, desperately trying to save my secrets. And then I'm gonna go to Daddy's closet, and take out Daddy's 45, and shoot that bully.

Because this diary is only for ARTnews...