

THE P.Y.T. ISSUE

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\$10.99

**pretty
young
things**

MARK FLOOD makes subversive, provocative art.

IT'S A BRUTALLY HOT Monday afternoon and I'm in an unidentified garage apartment that resembles a hunting lodge, with the artist, Mark Flood. He's a charming 50-but-could-pass-for-35-year-old creature, hunkered down on a fancy carpet, submitting warily to an interview with yours truly whilst juggling phone calls to his assistants. "I'm more emotionally involved in the careers of my assistants than in my own," he explains whilst watching an extremely popular network television program starring a reformed sex addict who plays a reformed sex addict on television, with subtitles for the hearing impaired. We've just gone through a box of press clippings from the past three decades, a fertile but unstable time for the artist during which he founded and disbanded seminal industrial band Culturcide, famous for vandalizing megahits such as Bruce Springsteen's *Dancing in the Dark*, among other milestones. From his early 1980's collages featuring re-configured popular advertisements - think of Richard Prince's Marlboro Men re-cast as overt sex fiends or mutants - to his self-aware text paintings on coroplast and cardboard featuring unforgettably cynical remarks that reveal the brutal inner monologue of the paintings themselves, Flood has consistently been out of step with, or perhaps in advance of, his contemporaries. But he's more interested in messing

with reality than in drawing attention to himself. During the 1992 Republican National Convention, he created scores of absurd protest posters [DESTROY THE ENVIRONMENT - CREATE NEW JOBS; BUSH IS GOD] and handed them out to friends, who carried them through the streets and eventually into the local media's coverage of the protests. He submitted glitter-covered syringes to a local museum's show of 'utilitarian

art' and applied for grants with slides featuring nude models. He once dabbled with selling advertising space on his paintings, and now that they eyes of the Art establishment are on him, he mentions that he's thinking about doing it again "for much higher rates". He provokes while posing as the unsuspecting fellow next to you in the crowd. Mark Flood is not his birth name but the latest in a series of pseudonyms. He's been using

friends, strangers and paid imposters as stand-ins at his photo-ops for twenty years, whilst his work has provoked violence, defacement and even been stolen from exhibitions, but you could pass him by in a parking lot without looking twice, a fact Mark clearly relishes. "I never liked having a name," he states. "I think of myself as somebody else, I'm just trying to pass for normal." Clearly uneasy with discussing his blurry self, Flood swings the conversation into a series of brutal tangents, from Minnesota's rogue taxidermist community to the appeal of using other artist's resumes and press releases as his own. Flood refuses to commit to a single social reality and as a result has probably lived fragments of a dozen distinct lives. In another time he could've held the most bawdy, cruel, and inaccessible salon of any given bohemian capital. Soon it is dark outside and we're discussing the resurgence of swaddling among young parents. He takes a swig of chocolate milk and deadpans the sound of a news announcer; "Overswaddled baby dies in car wreck. Distaught parents claim, 'We loved him too much'".

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