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The Mark Flood Experience Kills Painting (Again)

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | JANUARY 07, 2016



Mark Flood in his curated show "The Future Is Ow," standing in front of a print-on-canvas "painting" by Chris Bexar and holding a work by Susie Rosmarin. (Photo by Scott Indrisek)

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"Art looks a lot better when you're laying in bed," Mark Flood said, before getting supine on a mattress in the middle of Marlborough Chelsea, where his curated exhibition, "The Future Is Ow," is on view through February 6. While he admitted that he hates group shows organized around obvious material themes, he's gone ahead and made one of his own: The exhibition brings together five Texan artists (including Flood), all of whom are working with print-on-canvas technologies to some degree. The mattress the artist is sprawled on is one of half a dozen or so strewn in front of a monitor playing an animated video by Chris Bexar; the overall aesthetic goal, Flood explained, was to turn the gallery into a futuristic "suburban refugee center." Elsewhere, the space is interrupted by cozy rooms whose walls are formed from stretched print-on-canvas works by Flood and his cohorts (Bexar, as well as Paul Kremer and Susie Rosmarin). It all exudes a weird, quasi-degenerate vibe, one familiar to anyone who visited the Houston artist's *Insider Art Fair* (a grungy inversion of the typical art-and-commerce experience) or *Mark Flood Resents*, the scrappy pop-up gallery he hosted in New York and Miami. As the artist, who spent nearly two decades working for the Menil Collection, succinctly puts it: "I'm bored shitless with normal museum and gallery practices."

Flood himself is jovial, sporting a Southern twang, smart eyeglasses, and a pair of sneakers with comically bulbous soles. He's certainly not the bile-spouting madman you might expect from his often death-obsessed text-based paintings, the sort of uncuddly canvases that advise you to "Eat Human Flesh." ("I like art with an underlying 'Fuck You' message," he told me, somehow making the sentiment sound almost buoyantly optimistic.) Flood is clearly happy to help shepherd this small group of artists, who are friends and acquaintances, peers whose work he has purchased — work that, in some cases, has been made using the resources of his own Houston studio. The underlying tactic shared among them is at least a partial abandonment of paint in favor of digital-based printing; as a surprisingly catchy song accompanying the [animated trailer](#) for this exhibition stresses, "brushstrokes are for snitches, brushstrokes are for bitches." Chris Bexar's print-on-canvas works are based on photographs of computer heat-sinks taken from odd angles, giving them the appearance of looming skyscrapers. Susie Rosmarin, who makes "geometric abstraction with a lot of optical flicker," by Flood's reckoning, has been supplementing her old-school, paint-by-hand process with swifter digital printing; Paul Kremer, the genius behind *Great Art In Ugly Rooms*, creates "paintings" that are essentially screengrabs of Google Image search results for things like "what's great about America"; El Franco Lee II is fond of giclee reproductions of his original acrylic works, which are packaged and stacked here as if in a retail shop.

Flood's own print-on-canvas pieces in "The Future Is Ow" are typically discomfiting. One mixes a corporate org-chart with an image of an obese naked woman sitting in a car, and an equally naked, paunchy Seth Putnam (the late frontman of a band with an [unprintable name](#)) shooting heroin while receiving oral sex. Another, multi-part work uses stomach-churning viral images — paired with snippets of text culled from artist grant applications — to form the word YOLO. How, I wondered, did Flood manage to vacillate between work like this — with its aggressive desire to provoke, if not sicken — and the comparatively baroque, lush abstractions he's also been known to make? "It's not as different as it seems," he countered. "It's about finding the power of images and using them in a brutal, irrational way. I go for the gut, not the intellect. Super beautiful stuff gets this gut response, and these viral images are so intense, they also go for the gut." Still, Flood is aware that his YOLO painting isn't likely to find a ready place in a collector's home. ("People don't like hard cocks in their art," he shrugs — and, while I personally lost count, this show has more than a few.) The artist recalled a studio visit from Walter Hopps in the early '80s, during which the curator suggested he actually "think about what people will hang on their walls," advice that has clearly not been heeded. Regardless, Flood hopes that, over time, the art world's palette might be more ready for his less palatable offerings. "Analytical Cubism, no one wanted it then — and now, it's the most desirable," he mused. "And Warhol's 'Disaster' paintings, no one wanted them, and now they're the most desirable. So... maybe."

Flood is nothing if not prolific, at times to a fault, and it's clear that one appeal of digital printing is that it simply allows him to make more things — a way to keep up with the burbling gutter of the Internet itself. And part of the temptation is admittedly market-based: "We're gonna be grinding out Suzies like sausages!" he said, half-jokingly, when Rosmarin joins our conversation about the technology's benefits. But Flood does seem genuinely enamored of the beauty inherent in the results, as well as the possibilities for easily scaling-up images. At the very least, it makes installations like this one attainable, where faux-paintings are transformed into architectural elements (even if that means they run the risk of becoming wallpaper, albeit of the most confounding and obscene variety). It might be best to look at "The Future Is Ow" as a single, collaborative work, one that you could hang out in and, possibly, go to sleep in. "I want people to sit down or lay down, to have an experience," Flood said. "When you go somewhere — what do you remember? My intuition is, it's not walking around an evenly-lit white box with a bunch of paintings 66 inches apart. Fuuuuck that."