

LONDON

Mark Flood

MODERN ART

In certain societies, cannibals ate their opponents to acquire knowledge. Maybe that's why one of Mark Flood's more notorious paintings is emblazoned with the phrase EAT HUMAN FLESH. Although none of the Texan's thirteen recent works in his second London show, "American Buffet Upgrade," offers such explicit statements as his eponymous 1989 painting, his endeavor still reeks of a kind of cannibalism. The exhibition included three types of paintings, mainly his well-known "lace paintings" and a series based on digital images; there was also a single triptych of "aged paintings," which display corporate logos on highly cracked paint surfaces.

Flood points to Dave Hickey's *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1993) as the pivotal inspiration for the lace paintings, which he began making in 2000. "I was inspired by Hickey to explore the idea of beauty," he says, "as a way to say fuck you to art bureaucracy." He makes the paintings by using a piece of lace as a stencil. Paint-soaked

fabrics are sometimes laid parallel to the edges of the canvas, like a silk screen, and the resulting filigree creates a lush pictorial framing with a void or window in the middle where there was no lace. *Colonial Mirror* (all works 2015), for example, suggests a carpet or mirror with its yellow and green traceries along each side and an image of Washington crossing the Delaware at its bottom edge. The empty middle is a large wavy stretch of silvery gray.

The notion of a void is also present in the latest of Flood's large paintings created by UV ink-jet printing, and predominantly from low-resolution images of paintings by Mark Rothko. For example, *Honey Hole* is a big lemon-yellow painting with a hazy lime-green lozenge-shaped blob in the lower middle. The work has the least Rothkoesque palette of the four such pieces that were on view, yet together they clearly recall the Abstract Expressionist's work. They are paintings in form, and paintings in content, yet brought about in an unpainterly fashion. Similarly large and colorful but highly pixelated were two images of out-of-focus American flags, *American Blur* and *Flake Flag*.

At first glance, Flood seems to be cynically exploiting beauty (lace paintings) or making an ironic critique (whether of Rothko, painting in general, or corporate America). These are paintings without painting; even though the lace pieces are rich in their accreted texture and color, they also seem manufactured, albeit by hand. Is Flood pointing to the vacuity of American life or of the art world? Perhaps like other artists of the generation that emerged during the 1980s, he is working with the notion of an endgame, of paintings that consume themselves. Flood seems to walk a tightrope between sincere invention and an empty form of criticality. His irreverence and sarcasm show up in every interview, yet his adhesion to the concept of beauty and handmade painting suggests an underlying idealism. Back in the '80s, he founded a punk band, and the punk attitude is still there today. Flood is at once a provocateur, an entrepreneur, and a doubter.

—Sherman Sam



Mark Flood, *Colonial Mirror*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 60".