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FACEBOOK BLUR*  
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SYMBOLIZING  
THE ATTENUATED  
STATUS OF  
“FRIEND.”**

**Worth more  
dead than alive:  
Mark Flood’s  
*Willard* (2014)**



Courtesy Zach Feuer Gallery

**Mark Flood:  
‘Available NASDAQ Symbol’**

Zach Feuer Gallery  
548 West 22nd Street  
212-989-7700, zachfeuer.com  
Through June 14

▼ Art

## Après Flood, le Déluge

Houstonian Mark Flood’s capacity for art-world irony is as big as Texas

BY R.C. BAKER

**N**EW WALL STREET CRASH,” screams the headline of a vintage newspaper lying on the gallery’s front desk. A perusal of the brittle pages reveals not the crash of 1929 but a burst bubble from ’23 — just another spin in capitalism’s casino, that whirlwind of boom and bust that always manages to spare the 1 percent any of the real pain that trickles down to the other 99. And what do the denizens of that top tier do with their metastasizing fortunes? Some invest in the artwork of the provocatively sharp-witted artist Mark Flood, who in “Available NASDAQ Symbol” has filled the entrance to Zach Feuer Gallery with 10,000 stock certificates from various eras. (You’re welcome to sort through the heap to ascertain which firms are still in business.)

This presentation is echoed in the rear gallery, where tattered broadsheets are laid out like a carpet. Some of the headlines revel in Charlie Chaplin’s 1927 divorce

from a woman he’d impregnated when she was 16 — a reminder that celebrity scandal is a time-honored stratagem for moving product. The gallery also contains thousands of 78 rpm records and a plastic pup waiting for His Master’s Voice to emanate from the Victrola to which he is chained.

How much longer until the information in those teetering stacks of shellac and on those crumbling pages is inaccessible forever? Who decides what’s worth preserving as old analog systems decay? How long till our cutting-edge “cloud” goes the way of the ozone layer? Flood tackles that last question in the main gallery, where he has enlarged minuscule online logos into pixelated smog: At 4 feet square, the familiar “f” in *Blue Facebook Blur* (2014) disintegrates into hazy limbo, perhaps symbolizing the attenuated status of “friend” when one hungers for thousands of them.

A world-class malcontent, Flood was born in 1957 in Houston, which he once described as an “oil-stained, overdeveloped parking lot, packed with cars, lit-

tered with advertising, designed for profit, not people” (and where he still resides). That quote and many others — Interviewer: “Who are some of your favorite artists?” Flood: “Evolution, fog, reprographic errors, camouflage, defiant mental illness” — can be found in articles push-pinned to the gallery walls, elements of a textual mélange that also includes auction records of Flood’s own work, snippets about artworks he has purchased for himself over the years, and a website that advises collectors, which rated Flood a “Buy Now” shortly before ranking him No. 1 on the “Sell Now” hit parade.

Such ludicrous fluctuations get at the absurd allure of Art, that spectrum of coveted objects no one actually needs. Yet the marrow of civilization is precisely everything beyond bare-bones necessities required for survival, all the things that stoke our humanity: painting, literature, puppy cams. Mix astute technique, insightful concepts, and ever-evolving ideals of beauty with a dollop of scarcity and you get bur-

ghers spending exorbitant sums on flowers during Holland’s tulipmania of the 1630s and our own hedge-fund omnivores outbidding one another for Warhol Lizzes at auction houses.

Amid Flood’s ruckus are two beat-up copies of *All Star Comics* No. 3, published in December 1940 and now a bona fide collectible. Rather than sealing the precious artifacts in archival Mylar, the artist has left them lying around, encouraging viewers to flip through and behold the inaugural meet-up of the Justice Society of America. Flood has signed the covers, enhancing their value in the art market even as gallery-goers pawing the fragile pages decrease their worth at the next Comic Con — a hilarious send-up of the art world’s concept of “limited editions.”

No single object in this show is as flat-out gorgeous as Flood’s earlier, lace paintings — thick, flowing colors riven by exquisite textures — but this matrix coalesces into a beautiful rumination on the irrationality of desire. Throughout the space, the artist has placed battered metal racks that once held car batteries and now serve as resting places for painted casts of human skulls. A quintet of scarlet noggins dovetails with some of the red record labels in the back room (which themselves are reminiscent of those little red dots indicating that an artwork has sold); four black skulls reside on a rack adorned with a chevron that conjures Verizon’s checkmark logo, which in turn blares forth on the 9-foot-wide canvas that hangs above.

There are also paintings on burlap, whose thick white grounds are as cracked as the surface of a thrift-shop Old Master. On one, Flood has spray-stenciled the letters OWS facing off against the NYSE (New York Stock Exchange) logo, revisiting Occupy Wall Street’s protests. The faux craquelure base reminds us that the same class that can afford to collect art — including Flood’s own — would be happy to see Occupy’s challenge to the status quo relegated to the past (and the sooner the better).

Yellow skulls gather beneath another canvas, *Red, White, and Blue Drone Strip* (2014), which sports a greatly enlarged border from America’s first airmail stamp, issued in 1918 at the high-altitude face value of 24 cents. The postal service screwed up a single sheet of the stamp, printing its central image — a Curtiss biplane — upside down. Examples of the so-called Inverted Jenny have since sold for prices approaching \$1 million. In his homage, Flood has replaced the two-seater with a modern-day drone; the gallery is asking \$72,000 for this 13-foot-high inkjet print.

Misprinted stamps, portentous skulls, coercive wealth: Think of Oedipa Maas, paranoiac protagonist of Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, whose life is life turned topsy-turvy when she becomes executor of a mogul’s vast estate that includes human remains and a collection of sinisterly altered postage stamps. Rattled by her brushes with a nefarious conspiracy, she waits for an auctioneer to begin “crying” the sale of these deliberate errata, hoping to discern truth from raw information.

Maybe that’s where Flood got hold of his stamps.