

Money Lures

Richard Mock's Sculptures Hang in the Halls of Capital's Temples

Allan Antliff

2000

I have long admired Brooklyn-based Richard Mock for his outspoken commitment to anarchism and clear-sighted attacks on contemporary injustices.

Consequently, I was delighted to learn he has been exhibiting his most recent sculptures in bank lobbies, no less. But then, Mock has a way of getting what he wants: this show has graced several banks in Canada, the United States and Germany (hesitating bank managers get a free lure, Mock tells me).

The exhibit features about one hundred money lures, sculptures dangling from wires strung out in a row along the shiny marble walls of banks. Each lure has a nasty hook arching out in the vicinity of its shiny head, and is decorated with bright-coloured beads and wires. Bits of human bone protrude from some, and they all bristle with money. The money, I should add, is authentic U.S. currency. Mock buys it, pre-shredded, from a scientific supply house.

The lures take aim at the capitalist political economy by playing up money's role in our alienation from nature, encapsulated in a hostile technology that predates the invention of capital itself. I'm talking about fish lures, those ugly human imitations of nature (bugs, worms, etc.) with barbed hooks that lodge in the mouth-lining of a fish, ripping and tearing the poor creature as it struggles to escape.

Money is capitalism's update on the fish lure, a life-negating weapon now firmly lodged in the fabric of the planet because we're all hooked on it. Mock's money lures point back to the system's origins in a more general contempt for all living beings while bringing us up to date on just how self-destructive that stance has become. After all, the sole creatures on this planet attracted to money are humans. Money is the end goal in the great round of capitalist exchange, which only knows how to sustain "life" by killing it. Strip-mine the earth and leech it with cyanide for gold, cast out drift-nets and empty the oceans for pet food, spew ozone-destroying CFCs into the stratosphere for air-conditioning, but above all else, pray to your Gods for profits, because the "health" of the economy depends on it.

"Just Between You and Me"

The lures remind me of Lawrence H. Summers, former Chief Economist for the World Bank and Vice-President for Development Economics (now Treasury Under-Secretary in the Clinton administration). Summers first gained public notoriety in 1992 for circulating a memo to six top-echelon World Bank administrators on the topic of dirty industries polluting wealthy nations.

He wrote: "Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [less developed countries]? The measurement of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with

the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.”

Impeccable Logic of Polluting

Money works magic. It whisks industrial toxins from the lowly environmental realm to the high peaks of economics, where titans like Summers number-crunch the figures down to conclude that, yes, rich peoples’ cancers (only people matter here) cost more than poor peoples’ cancers. Hence, the impeccable logic of polluting the entire planet to maintain a healthy global economy “on the cheap,” appropriately enough.

But I digress. One hundred or so lures trying to hook the public in a bank lobby are just a playful ruse for the real thing, namely the dehumanizing reward-and punishment economics of capital awaiting within.

As Mock put it, “acquiring money is a cultural obsession [that] takes over other areas that could have been emotionally rewarding. Money itself has no emotion connected to it. To value it as you would a life companion is absurd.”

And yet, people like Summers do value money over their capacity to be human, day in and day out, every time they rush past a street person on the way to the bank. Which is to say that our current state of affairs is not only unsustainable: it is soul-crushing as well.

Mock in Detroit (sidebar)

JB

Richard Mock will be exhibiting his linocuts and money lure sculptures in Detroit this November.

Some of the linocuts have appeared on the *Fifth Estate* pages and covers, *El Tiempo* in Colombia, and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees magazine *Unite!/Unidad!* (are you wearing Nike or New Balance?).

From his press in Brooklyn, Mock has given voice to women, workers, and the earth, taken on the unnatural boundaries of the state and their often lethal consequences, or the debris of war left behind on the bird’s wing.

Paul Heath Hoeffel, in a monograph for an exhibition at The Gallery, at Southern Methodist University describes him as “an artist intensely in touch with the world around him, scanning every face, every street scene, every newspaper for information on the state of humanity, and devising strategies and schemes to counter the powers that rob our world of vitality and integrity, whether in a Brooklyn neighborhood, the downtown art world, or the ozone layer.”

Mock’s work will be shown at Alley Culture (in the alley between Trumbull and Lincoln, red building south of W. Willis, south of Wayne State University), November 3 through December 2, 2000. The opening reception will be held Friday, November 3rd from 7 to 9 pm. Alley Culture is a space that has housed a number of whole room installations by New York artists, and keeps a dialogue going between Detroit artists by inviting them to curate and exhibit.

Related

See “Richard Mock’s Epic Vision,” FE #373, Fall 2006.

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