

# ARTISTS' LEGACY FOUNDATION

## IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRIS HOOD

*The Artists' Legacy Foundation interviewed artist Chris Hood in conjunction with the exhibition Chris Hood and Viola Frey at Et al. etc. in San Francisco, CA (July 12 - August 24, 2019).*

**ALF:** How did you first learn about Viola Frey's work?

**CH:** I came across Viola's work pretty early on, as an undergrad student, from a professor. I was looking at grad schools, and at the time had been influenced by - I wouldn't call Viola an outsider artist - but an artist that had a strong sense of personal vision, and that's something I've always been influenced by. But as I

was looking at graduate schools in San Francisco, this person turned me on to some of her work. And then later on as a student there, and continuing on as I moved to New York, I started to make connections between a lot more of the artists in her era - people that were working in and out of the limelight of New York City - but kind of creating their own histories in other regions of the country. So she certainly was a strong voice for



Chris Hood, *Desert Vista*, 2019.



Viola Frey, *Untitled (Bricolage with Pink Oval Head in Hat)*, c. 1980-1983.

me, and from the Bay Area. And then when thinking, talking with Aaron and Jackie of Et al Gallery, Aaron refreshed my memory of some of Viola's work and recent exhibitions that had been going on with her work, as I was talking with him about trying to formulate an exhibition. So it was serendipitous in that he reminded me of my old favorite, in a certain sense. And so that's how we started to talk about forming this show.

**ALF:** Do you see aesthetic similarities between your style of painting and Viola's work?

**CH:** I do, absolutely. Viola, for me, really stands as someone who sought to push beyond the recognizable into the eternal truth, or eternal forms. She used this kind of contemporary iconography and things we can have access to understand being alive - the forms of the hand and facial expressions and the vase, these kind of things. But I think there's an alchemy that forms with her work, that gets beyond, and goes into a plane of discovery, almost, a kind of accident or way of bringing about an otherness to the work. And for me, that happens within the painting in the sense of the way applying veils of color that seep

through to the canvas, so there's a way of trying to find what's going to happen on the other side once the process is done. And that's really exciting for me, for a lot of artists who hand themselves over to the material and the discovery process and to finding something, again, just beyond what they might envision of their own accord.

*"... through artists like Viola there is a real possibility for true discovery, true beyond the realms of just one's own cognization..."*

**ALF:** Absolutely. Viola expressed in an earlier interview about how she never quite knew what was going to come out of the kiln. Someone saw her taking things out of

the kiln and saw that expression of joy in her face, that it was even better than she thought it might be. It's a real element of discovery at the final process.

**CH:** Yeah, I think that's actually one of the main purposes of art. You know, I think we, as an art audience, we're quite familiar with the exacting nature of some kinds of artists, like Warhol, for example, where the otherness has been sealed tight out of the work, and what I think it's important to remember is through artists like Viola there is a real possibility for true discovery, true beyond the realms of just one's own cognization of something. That, I think, is an essential goal of art.



Installation view, *Chris Hood and Viola Frey*, 2019.



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**ALF:** Absolutely. I'm curious how you select your imagery and where the basis of your paintings come from, or if it is a lot of alchemy and in-the-moment type of iconography.

**CH:** While I'm working I tend to think of hybridizing these forms. The imagery originates as something kind of personal, from my own photography, or drawings, or things that I've found, you know, as I go about my life, but they tap into an archetype - an image that we all can come to. And often within my process I am going back and forth between sketches, perhaps even found imagery, my own personal imagery, sometimes I make collages of these things. And so there's a kind of bringing myself and a kind of archetype, the imagery of my own life, and the archetypal ones go



Chris Hood, *Open Window*, 2019.

together that I use within the paintings. And then as they are developing, there's also these few things that happen, where I continue the hybridizing of the imagery as they unfold out of my mind, and also from these developed processes of quoting from the outside world and using my own energy.

**ALF:** I think it's really interesting to think of the inner mind. We're always talking about the personal and the universal. You know, what aspects of contemporary culture are relevant right now and are easy to decode right now, and then what's going to be easier to decode in the future, and what is going to remain in the future, and how will Viola Frey's works be viewed in that way. I think it would be interesting to know if you have a vision for how you think your work may



Viola Frey, *Untitled (Cup Bricolage with Monkey, Boat, Mouse, and Hand)*, 1995.

be interpreted in the future.

**CH:** Absolutely, I think Viola's work can and will be tapped into multiple points in the future, as people come to rediscover, in a sense, art again and again, and I think artists that can find the simple truth in the work, a kind of eternal truth. In Viola's work, I can see - like in my own work - we use color, form, and the act of creation. That those kind of very simplistic elements are done in such a lively and spirited way, I think it speaks through time. With my work, I similarly hope that they are resonating in the contemporary time, but I also aim for them to tap into a more historical, eternal truth of understanding what it is to be a human, and the world, in a certain sense...I think that Viola's works, in a similar way, can be tapped into at multiple points, just given the perspective of the audience.

## PHOTO CREDITS

Chris Hood, *Desert Vista*, 2019, alkyd on canvas, 42 x 36 in. Image courtesy of the artist.

Viola Frey, *Untitled (Bricolage with Pink Oval Head in Hat)*, c. 1980-1983, ceramic and glazes, 29 1/4 x 21 3/4 x 14 in., VF-0683CSS. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

Installation views, *Chris Hood and Viola Frey, Et al. etc.*, San Francisco, CA, 2019. Images courtesy of Et. al. etc.

Chris Hood, *Open Window*, 2019, alkyd on canvas, 30 x 24 in. Image courtesy of the artist.

Viola Frey, *Untitled (Cup Bricolage with Monkey, Boat, Mouse, and Hand)*, 1995, ceramic and glazes, 17 1/2 x 15 3/4 x 11 in., VF-0571CSS. Photo: M. Lee Fatherree.

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