

An aerial photograph of a large stackhouse, showing a dense grid of wooden beams forming a series of parallel aisles. The perspective is from above, looking down at the structure. The beams are light-colored wood, and the overall layout is highly organized and repetitive.

MICKETT-STACKHOUSE: CONFLUENCE

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Confluence focuses on the collaborative practice of Carol Mickett and Robert Stackhouse, who have been working together for over nineteen years.

Producing large-scale sculpture, paintings, and prints, the Mickett–Stackhouse team pushes one another out of their respective comfort zones. Mickett came to the partnership with a background in philosophy and theater, while Stackhouse has been an established artist working in sculpture and printmaking since the 1970s, with works in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York and others.



Mickett-Stackhouse has exhibited extensively in New York and Florida, and has produced commissions in Chattanooga, TN; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE; Indianapolis Art Center; Richmond, VA; and Tampa, FL. Both Mickett and Stackhouse hold PhDs: Mickett in philosophy from the University of Minnesota, and Stackhouse an honorary doctorate in art from his alma mater, the University of South Florida.

The MFA Spotlight series focuses on contemporary art by artists with ties to the Tampa Bay Area.

The following interviews were conducted with Carol Mickett and Robert Stackhouse on January 18, 2017 and February 14, 2018.

KP: *Confluence* is a celebration of your collaborative process. Could you please tell us about how your partnership came about?

CM: We met in Kansas City, Missouri. I had a radio show at the time, where I interviewed artists, put on plays, did poetry readings – it really ran the gamut of the arts. Robert was part of a foundation there, the Belger Family Art Foundation, and they requested that I interview him.

When I do these interviews, like with *Our Town* at the Dali Museum, I extensively research a person. After the radio interview, Belger hired me to do a movie about Robert. I put a team together, and we did a short film about Robert's sculpture at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. We spent a lot of time together, started working in the studio together, and we've been collaborating ever since.

KP: Collaboration doesn't necessarily come easily to a lot of people – were there building blocks in your lives that prepared you for this long-term project?

CM: One of the building blocks was that by the time we got together in our team, we were both established people. We had

strong personalities, and strong thoughts about how things should be done. Part of the collaboration was standing up for our views. Large arguments were an important part of the process. One of the things that happens when you collaborate, is you learn that you really need to trust the other person. Even though we knew each other, and cared for and loved each other, there was the question of can I trust this person professionally? How can both be heard? It was a long process. Now, we still go through that dance a bit, but no one storms out.

RS: Before I met Carol, my studio was in New York City, and I did very large-scale sculpture around the country. The idea of collaboration was very important at that time, because I had to trust a lot of people. Installations were carried out in very little time, with everything happening in quick turn. Creating a 160 foot sculpture in five or ten days is a difficult task.

I also started working in printmaking, which is just by nature a collaborative effort. Printmaking studios are very sociable. Working with master printers, you're both working towards a common goal, to come up with the best print possible. As collaborators, you're able to merge strengths.

CM: When it comes to collaboration, before I was involved with radio and theater, I was a philosophy professor and taught feminist theory. One of the foundations is the investigation of collaboration. Don't impose your will, don't be a colonialist – be someone that engages in the community. I saw that the way Robert was working really fit with my views and so that was a good step for us to begin working together. Collaboration has always been a good way to live my life and do work.

KP: There are some distinct motifs in your work, for instance the moon and water elements. Can you tell us about that symbolism?

RS: Both are a continuum from what we did before we knew each other. Not necessarily in content, but method and process. I came to Florida in the 1950s, and then came back with Carol around 2000– she was taken aback by hurricanes. We lived on the water, near Lassing Park. It caught her attention – the mechanics of the hurricane. The fact that warm water feeds it, that dust storms off of Africa can have an effect, or low pressure in Yucatan. Carol became fascinated, that's her type of mind. Water became a subject for us.

CM: Water became a major element in our work because of where we live, surrounded by it. Water also has lots of elements to it – it's a shape shifter, as it can be solid, vapor, or fluid. It has a particular molecular structure to it that scientists at Berkeley have been having major discussions about: that the structure of water as we understand it is actually very anomalous. It became a good thing for us as artists to explore.

RS: My attraction to water is it's hard to make a sculpture of it – you're almost guaranteed to fail. That's attractive.

CM: It also has become a unifying force. It's a wonderful way of showing how interconnected we are. All the waters are connected, just the way collaboration works.



Mickett-Stackhouse, *First Moon*, 2013, Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, Collection of the Artists

KP: That's a beautiful segue into the moon motif, and how it played out in *Irma Reflections*.

RS: Carol has always been drawn to the moon. Living in Tampa Bay and looking to the east, we saw the moon come up over the water every morning. We were researching imagery for some new white on white paintings for a project in Japan, which are technically very difficult to resolve. Somehow we found imagery of the rabbit in the moon, similar to our idea of the man in the moon.

CM: The moon for me has always been identified as female, and the sun as male, which bothered me. I was in Hawaii, and went to a sacred place on the Big Island very early in the morning, while the moon was still up, and full. The sun came up, and I was watching it. All of a sudden it dawned on me that I couldn't look at the sun directly, but I could see the light of the sun in the moon. Without the moon, I couldn't see the sun. The moon was an entity in and of itself, but reflected this light. In *Irma Reflections*, each of us becomes the moon for other people. We have an entity, but we need others for identity.



Mickett-Stackhouse, *Irma Reflections*, 2017-18. Courtesy of the Artists. Photo by Thaddeus Root.

KP: *Irma Reflections*¹ was a participatory work and performance that was inspired by your experiences during the hurricane. Could you give us some details on the project?

CM: We moved to Tarpon Springs just before the hurricane came. We were on the water and afraid to stay there, so we went to the downtown Hilton in St. Petersburg. We knew that was a safe hotel. The people who worked there could not have been nicer, or more generous. Every staff member was allowed to bring families and pets. That evening I got really afraid, and Robert suggested that I think about the MFA show. I said we should do a piece based on thanks; something that people can actively participate in and say what they were thankful for instead of focusing on the fear related to the hurricane.

KP: The moon is not only a symbol of your collaboration, but also about being heard, being recognized. *Irma Reflections* had a major performance element. How did you enjoy regularly interacting with Museum visitors?

RS: The interesting thing is people were surprised when we talked to them. It was an instant engagement; the art starts talking to them instead of being quiet on the wall.

CM: It was an important way of engaging visitors not only in their lives with respect to their experiences during the hurricane, but also in participating in what a museum is all about – namely, art and artists. It's important to meet artists in person, and to see the crossover between art and life.

KP: We thank you for your time and for your generosity. It was thrilling for us at the Museum to see such engagement with and participation from our visitors.

¹ This participatory installation involved moon-shaped papers that Museum visitors were invited to fill out with the artists during appointed times twice a week, answering the following questions: *What is your name? Where were you during Irma? Who would you like to thank for his or her support (physical or emotional) during Irma? Feel free to include a brief explanation. What is today's date?* The papers were affixed to a gallery wall in the shape of the moon, and then on the evening of December 3, 2017 during the Full Cold Moon, were read aloud before being burned as a celebration of thanks sent into the universe.

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OCTOBER 7, 2017 – FEBRUARY 4, 2018

Lee Malone Gallery

The MFA Spotlight series focuses on contemporary art by artists with ties to the Tampa Bay Area

CHECKLIST

Structure of Water, 2015
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
Collection of the Artists

First Moon, 2013
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
Collection of the Artists

Corcoran Moon, 2015
Screen Print, ed. 30
Collection of the Artists

Topos, AP 4/8, 2013
Vandercamp Letterpress Relief Print, ed. of 24
Tandem Press
From the collection of Desmond Clark and Thaddeus Root

Approaching Brainard Drawing, 2007
Watercolor and ink
Collection of the Artists

Cypress Moon Plans
Pencil on graph paper
Collection of the Artists

Irma Reflections, 2017
Site-specific participatory installation
Paint and printed cardstock

Cover: Mickett-Stackhouse, *Structure of Mist*, 2015,
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, Collection of the Artists



255 Beach Drive NE, St. Petersburg, FL 33701 | mfastpete.org   

