

Modernism gallery opens survey exhibition of works by Oakland painter Mark STOCK [1951-2014]

Modernism presents a retrospective of Stock's oeuvre, exploring the narrative potential of figurative painting and the development of his ever-evolving butler.

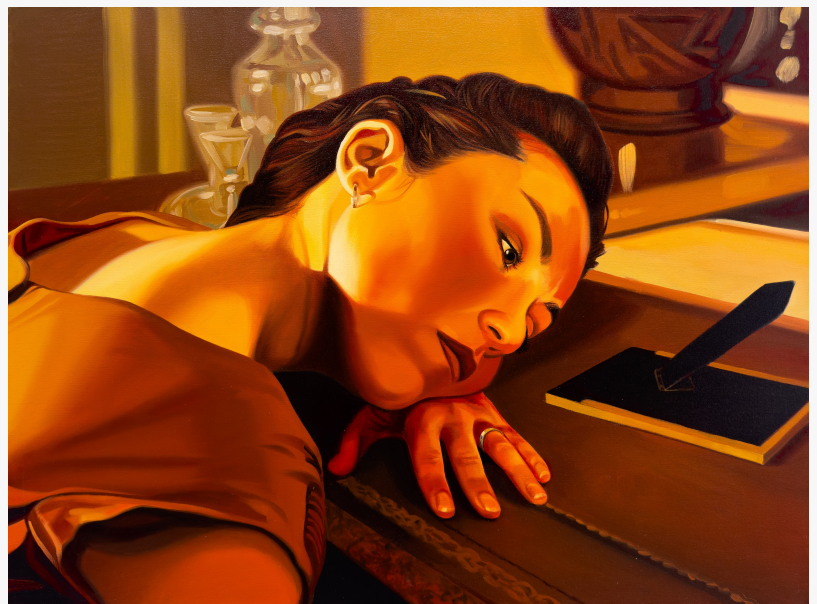
SAN FRANCISCO, CA, UNITED STATES, January 29, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Mark STOCK](#): Peripeteia

Visiting the Louvre in 1993, Mark Stock was mesmerized by "[The Magdalene with the Smoking Flame](#)" (c. 1640). In subject matter, the seventeenth century religious scene was a world apart from Stock's depictions of trysting lovers and despondent butlers.

Yet the tour de force by Georges de La Tour [1593-1652] anticipated Stock's paintings in ways that became more and more apparent the longer he gazed. In "The Magdalene" and other works Stock studied, de La Tour told a complicated story in a single frame using light as his narrator.

Returning to his Oakland studio, Stock paid tribute to de La Tour's candles. In a series of large canvases, he painted their portraits. Positioned front and center, the candles became characters as romantic as his lovers and as forlorn as his butlers. Stock also introduced candles into his own artwork, letting them narrate the film noir plotlines that increasingly occupied his paintings.

The intense exchange between Mark Stock and Georges de La Tour is one of the pleasures of looking at Stock's oeuvre, a vast body of work created over a four-decade career tragically abbreviated by his premature death in 2014. An incisive retrospective at [Modernism](#) shows highlights dating back to 1984, when Stock started to explore the narrative potential of contemporary figurative painting and began to develop characters including his ever-evolving butler.

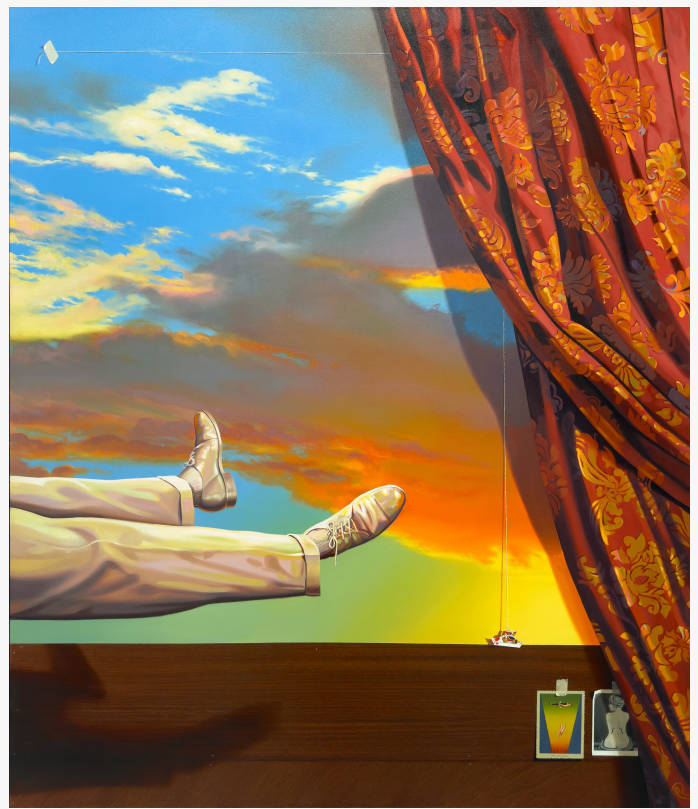


Mark STOCK [1951-2014], "Gnaw," 2003, oil on canvas

At the time, Stock was living in Los Angeles, and one of his primary frames of reference was cinema. Even more than film noir, Stock drew inspiration from Charlie Chaplin, whose Tramp showed Stock how to convey his feelings through an alter ego. "When I was in turmoil and painted myself as the butler," Stock told the writer Barnaby Conrad III in an eponymously titled monograph, "I felt I was making a painting the way Chaplin would make a film. The butler is the Tramp and the Tramp is the butler, and I'm the butler too."

Anticipated by "The Bellhop" (1984), the butler is represented in the Modernism retrospective with "The Butler's In Love #17" (1986) as well as three trompe l'oeil paintings from 2006. While the two paintings from the '80s show Stock's talent for communicating emotion through gestures and facial expressions – showing the unrequited yearnings of servants in love with those a class above them – the 2006 series highlights Stock's remarkable blend of technical mastery and conceptual audacity. Drawing on the 19th century still life tradition of William Harnett and John Haberle – as well as the philosophical games of literary figures including Jean Baudrillard and Jorge Luis Borges – the trompe l'oeil paintings create a metanarrative in which the butler has been sketched and the drawings kept as souvenirs. Might the drawings belong to the butler's mistress? Might he have given them to her? Might his love have been requited after all, his mistress a mistress in both senses of the word? These Proustian possibilities and others are intentionally left open for interpretation by the viewer.

Stock saw a connection between trompe l'oeil illusionism and magic, which he performed with elan and which provided another important inspiration. The connection is



Mark STOCK [1951-2014], "Reverie #11," 2008, oil & acrylic on canvas



Mark STOCK [1951-2014], "Impulse #2," 2011, oil on canvas

explicit in "Reverie #11" (2008), which shows the legs of a performer levitating over a trompe l'oeil stage set. It's also evident in several paintings depicting performers from Teatro Zinzanni, a San Francisco dinner theater that became a second home for the artist.

From Stock's perspective, the theater was as imbued with theatricality off stage as much as under the spotlight. Like the film noir intrigues he evoked in paintings such as "Gnaw" and "Ponder" (2003), he created backstage tableaux that could be interpreted in myriad ways, all dramatically unresolved. Near the end of his life, he lit some of these paintings with the glow of smartphones, a postmodern update on Georges de La Tour's candles. We will never know what is written on the phone illuminating the performer's face in "Elena in Rapture" (2011) any more than the letters in the hands of "Candace" and "Michael" (2006). Like Stock standing in front of "The Magdalena" at the Louvre, all we can do is to continue looking in wonder.

Mark Stock's works are in the permanent collections of institutions including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and the Library of Congress. He is also acclaimed for his stage and costume designs, realized for the Los Angeles Chamber Ballet and the Rudy Perez Dance Company.

Asa Perryman
Modernism Inc.
+1 415-541-0461

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