

The Institute of Illegal Images

Made speaks with Marc McCloud



MADE: Have you always lived in San Francisco?

MARK McCLOUD: No, I was raised in Argentina. My father went down there after the Second World War to build automobiles.

MD: How did you get back to the States?

MM: At twelve they sent me to a boarding school in LA, during the hippie revolution - 1966. It was like a chemistry lab for guinea pigs, and we got all the best drugs in the mail. That's how I got interested in LSD.

MD: I heard it all started when you fell out a Fourth-storey window...

MM: Oh yeah. I had like a death/rebirth experience, and then it correlated very heavily with my LSD experiences.

MD: Were you doing a lot of LSD before then?

MM: Yeah, before, during, and after. I was also a '50s baby; a lot of '50s babies are LSD babies. The moms were given the base of acid, Gotamine Tartrate, to induce parting. That was a common thing. The doctors wanted to go golfing, so to speed up the parting they would give women LSD. If you know any '50s babies, they're probably acid kids.

MD: When did you become interested in blotter art?

MM: What happened was Stanley Owsley's pill press got busted. The major distribution of LSD was in pill form until he got busted. The FBI got 'em, back in '71. They busted him and them all in jail. When his pill presses disappeared the need for blotter paper arose. There was a little acid on paper before then as a commercial enterprise, but it wasn't soaked it was just printed on there, like drops. The little printing presses here in San Francisco, a few of them started operating as small cells, putting out these different images, and distributing LSD on them. And so I thought it would be cool to save an example of them to show our kids later.



MD: Were you consciously trying to curate a collection of blotter art?

MM: It was subtle. I was scoring different little blotter images and window panes. Not all of them were blotters; some of them were on gels.

MD: On gels?

MM: Yeah you know, like window pane acid? Some of them were gels. I was saving them in the freezer and sampling them occasionally, trying to make sure I didn't eat all of one pattern, trying to keep an example at least. Then I said, "Hey, why don't I frame a few?" I started off framing single hits, four-ways. As I started framing them and putting them up on the wall, people would say, "I saved a hit in a book that kicked my ass five years ago, why don't you have it." The framed blotter started calling other blotter to it. That's how I compiled a little history of it.

MD: The collection that you make available to the public are reproductions of original blotter art?

MM: They're forensic type photographs of originals. At my last trial, they had an FBI agent that had spent 300 hours of forensic study on the work, but he didn't have a single photograph. When I beat that trial and was acquitted, it took me a while to recover. When I recovered I knew I better do forensic style photographs.

MD: Is it illegal to have blotter art? What are they trying to nail you on?

MM: They always try to nail me on manufacturing and distribution of LSD, the big one. But I don't want to get into that and worry too much about it. It just kind of comes with my job description: the guy that frames blotter and tries to keep it, so we have examples for the future. There's a lot of reasons to collect blotter. They're really cool art pieces and they're really important art pieces because they're the kind of art pieces that change your life.

MD: Sometimes these printed images are thought of as a stamp of authenticity, or a mark of quality control, or a guaranteed prophecy for what the trip might bring...

MM: That's another way to look at it. The people that do the art work and dip the LSD are very much involved in this magical kind of ritual. Whatever is put into the print is important for the trip.



MD: Paper is really difficult to date, how do you date the blotter?

MM: When they first started dipping paper, sometimes there was actual blotter paper used. More often than not, it was the type of paper used in medical facilities, like chromatography paper or litmus paper. It's the kind of paper that's germ free. When they first started dipping acid, they thought it was necessary. The first blotter is this puffy chromatography paper, and then it moved on to blotter paper, and then it moved in to any paper that doesn't contain bleach. That's the only rule to remember when you're making your own blotter is: don't use the bleached paper because the bleach will neutralize the LSD. When they first started making blotter, they set all their colors in either gold or silver ink so they wouldn't run when they put them into an alcohol solution with your LSD. Nowadays with the soy based inks, they don't run in alcohol, and you can save yourself a lot of hassle. That's generally the only rule in paper because they've tried everything. They've even put it on rice paper and there's one on the site that's from 2004 and it's done through a computer printer, not an offset printer.

MD: What do you think about that?

MM: I like it. I think variety is the spice.

MD: I'm really surprised computers have crept into this field too.

MM: I think, if they get the formula right, they'll be able to email it.

MM: Are you seeing resurgence in psychedelia and LSD at the moment?

MD: I'm so fanatical about it that I've never seen it do anything but increase. To me it's been a renaissance pill. I think that a lot of artists and intellectuals took it and through their good intentions it's been snowballing ever since, regardless of the statistics of the FBI. It's ever on the increase I would think, just by looking at the 875,000 LSD sites on the Net. To me it's an ever increasing thing depending on how much sensationalism is attributed to it, whether it's in the news or not.

MD: Is there anyone else that has a collection that rivals yours?

MM: I would say the other biggest collection is probably the FBI. They have an example of everything I have. They kept it after my last trial - they snuckered it - but I have no problem with that. They don't show their collection, I show mine. Someday after the revolution, we will show their collection along with mine.

MD: What kind of stuff does the FBI have?

MM: Just all the stuff they've busted. I have a reporter friend who works for The Washington Post, and he went to see their collection and said mine was better. I say try a little honey instead of busting everyone.



MD: What is the Holy Grail of blotter art? And which is your favorite of your collection?

MM: I'd really like a Mr. Natural, but it's not a big deal. I have the image. One that I have that I like a lot is The Tetragramaton.

MD: The Tetragramaton's serious.

MM: It's a very serious topic. It's funny but it's also serious. Everybody that trips, has one trip they compare the rest of their trips to. That's what's going on with the imagery I think, if you're that observant. A lot of people don't even look at it, they just snarf it.

MD: Few people get to see whole full sheets.

MM: It's very rare to see a full sheet. I spent a long time collecting before I connected with the full sheet. It was much harder to get undipped sheets when I started collecting. Now you just have to get on eBay and you can get a lot of blotter, some of it vintage. When I started collecting it was easier to buy dipped sheets, than to get that close to a source that might have sheets that are undipped.

MD: Can you let us in on any big acid rumors?

MM: The really good one that's in the history books is Ronnie Starks, who was the head of The Brotherhood of Eternal Love and a CIA agent, apparently filled a cargo trunk full of LSD crystal and hid it in Death Valley at a depth where it wouldn't fall victim to hot weather, oxygen and ultra violet light.

MD: Have you heard anything about The Grateful Dead burying capsules of LSD?

MM: Oh yeah, that one comes up all the time. The old chemist drags out the shovel, goes out in the back yard and drags out something very old. Then Mountain Girl complains about that it's not as good as it used to be.

MD: Is it possible for LSD to deteriorate over time?

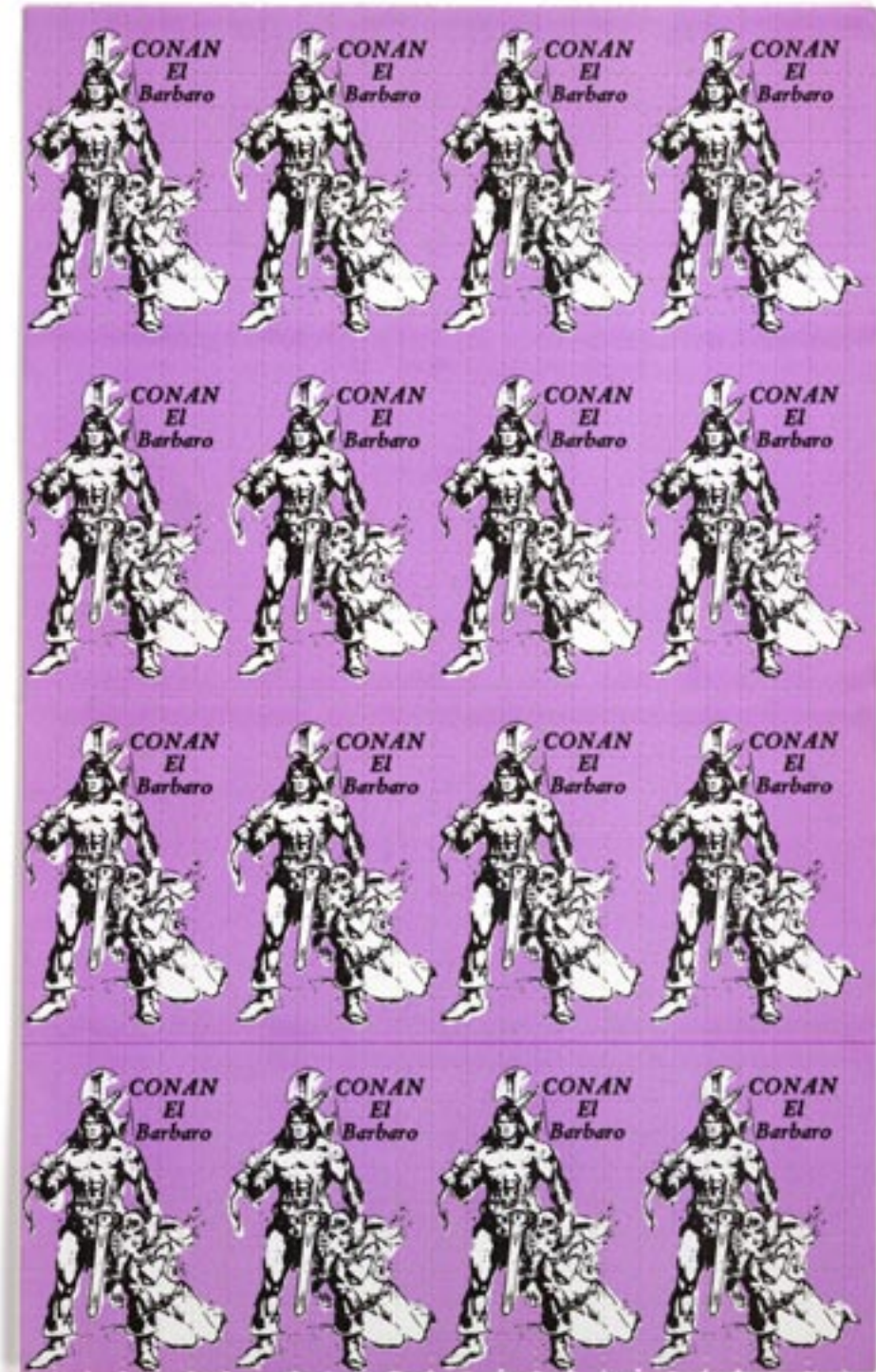
MM: Yeah, it can spoil, but it's not as bad as people think.

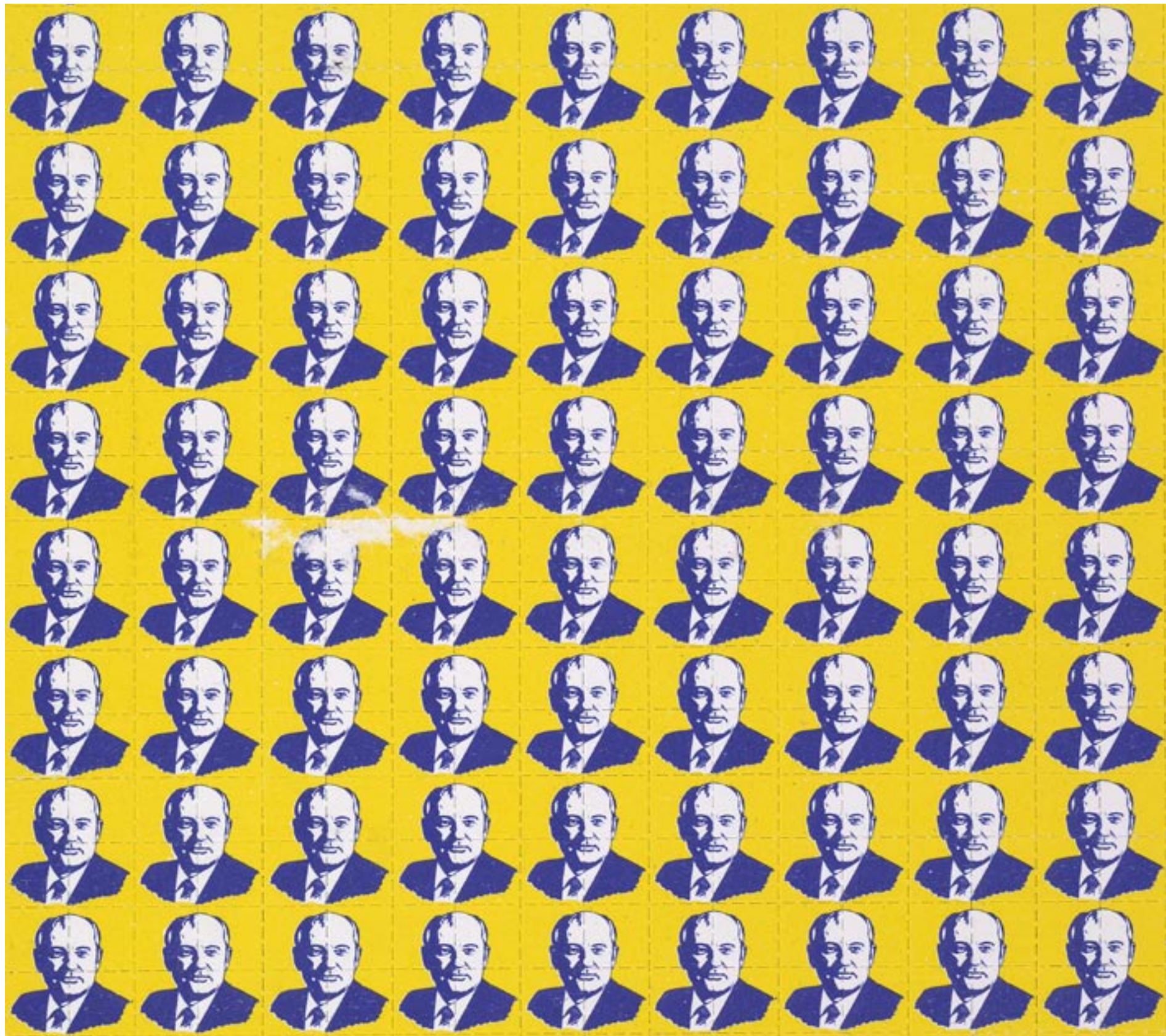
MD: What would happen if you did a tab of spoiled acid?

MM: It just wouldn't be as strong. It's kind of like Uranium. It has a half life and a quarter life and so on. The spent LSD is called Iso-LSD. It's the non psychotropic substance. That's how I get away with showing my Iso-theories; I've converted the LSD into Iso-LSD, a non psychedelic substance.

MD: Do you microwave it?

MM: No, just by exposing the sheets to light and oxygen you neutralize LSD. My idea was just by framing them, I'm Iso-ing them. The rumor is, if you get an Iso and dip it again, it'll be twice as strong.





MD: Can you verify that?

MM: Just from personal experience, nothing scientific. Then there's also the rumor you know, how they say Ron Regan talked Gorbachev into tearing down the wall.

MD: On acid?

MM: No, but when you look at the Gorbachev hit, that's the Gorbachev's that tore the wall down...

MD: Okay. What do you think about LSD being manufactured by the FBI, for just the use of telepathy.

MM: Oh yeah, that's good stuff. I've tried that stuff, the government acid. It's really good, but it works both ways. You can't hide what you are. So if you're a FBI agent and you're using it, you broadcast, "I'm an FBI agent using LSD!" That's what's good. It might be the last safe meeting place; telepathy.

MD: So you've had telepathic experiences?

MM: Hell yeah! I was with a group people that were having a similar experience. I don't want to drop anyone else's name besides myself, but there was some fabulous people there; across from Electric Lady Land studios in New York City. The good thing about it is you can't lie on acid and so you can resolve a lot of difficulties in a very quick amount of time. We had like eight people there that were trying to kill me before I stepped in the room, and then after I'd been there for about 30-seconds we all hugged, kissed, and partied. What was good about this experience, unlike many of my telepathic experiences, is that it was shared. A lot of the time you think you're telepathic and no one agrees; that can be awfully lonely. But this was a shared telepathic experience. There was even a person there that wasn't on acid that had to leave. As she left, she said, "You guys from California and your telepathy."

