

For immediate release

LLYN FOULKES

April 29 – June 24, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, April 29, 6-8 PM

Special Event:

Guided tour of the exhibition with Margot Norton: Saturday, May 6, 4 PM



Art Official, 1985
Mixed media
55 x 46 inches
(139.7 x 116.8 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of major works by Los Angeles-based artist Llyn Foulkes, on view at 533 West 19th Street in New York. Including exemplary works from 1964 to 2005, the exhibition comprises three series that define Foulkes's six-decade-long career: mountainous landscapes, "bloody head" portraits, and narrative tableaux.

Foulkes's singular oeuvre has inhabited and excavated the remains of the American West and its attendant promise of freedom and prosperity. Probing a once wondrous frontier, now rendered a wasteland, Foulkes exposes the American Dream as co-opted by an increasingly commercialized, corporatized, and militarized society. The landscape of the American West features prominently throughout his works, signifying both the once-cherished myth and subsequent failure of the American Dream.

Inspired by old touristic postcards, Foulkes's "postcard paintings" of mountains and rocks turn towards Pop, incorporating standardized imagery and serial elements. *Death Valley, Calif.* (1964) depicts a mountainous expanse, modeled by soaking rags in pigment and applying them directly onto the surface of the work to create a subtle texture and shading, thus attaining a nearly photorealistic quality. The work is anchored at its left and bottom edges by a yellow and black striped border, recalling cautionary road signs. Underneath five stamp-like bald eagles lies an inscription copied from a book by Ulysses S. Grant: "This painting is dedicated to the American."

Is this dedication a sincere statement of gratitude or allegiance, or does it evoke a heavy-handed patriotism or claim of entitlement? The various framing devices surrounding the seemingly untouched terrain remind viewers that this is a representation, a fragmentation of the frontier that has been commoditized for cursory enjoyment.

Foulkes's "bloody head" portraits—depicting deformed or obstructed faces—began with a self-portrait, *Who's on Third* (1971-1973). After encountering an autopsied corpse at a mortuary, he concealed the portrait's recognizable features with a flow of lurid red blood and a cloth-like mask. Subsequent bloody head paintings exemplify an increasingly critical view of American politics and popular culture, taking up presidents, military figures, corporate businessmen, and the entertainment industry as subjects. In the 1980s, Walt Disney, Mickey Mouse, and other comic characters became recurring figures in his narrative paintings—now sinister intrusions representing disillusionment with the wholesome agenda proffered by the Disney Empire.

Another group of portraits integrates photographs, painted over with oil, as well as found materials that extend out of the wooden frame. With these tableaux works, Foulkes sought to attain an even greater illusion of depth. In addition to utilizing found materials, the artist's distinctive technique involves carving directly into wood to create real shadows; some of his works expand to immersive size, taking several years to finish. *Old Glory* (1996/2001-2003) sardonically portrays a barren landscape made of rough-carved wood and various recycled materials. At center, the American flag hangs limply over a pile of burning rubble, and in the background stands the only lasting monument: a yellow arched McDonalds sign. In *Where Did I Go Wrong?* (1991) Foulkes's pop cultural critique meets his earlier landscape paintings and—as with many of the works presented here—expresses a personal and collective anxiety.

Born in 1934 Yakima, Washington, **Llyn Foulkes** studied at University of Washington, Seattle (1953-1954); Central Washington College, Ellensburg (1954); and Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles (1957-1959). Between 1954 and 1956, he was a member of the U.S. Army in Germany.

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Since the 1960s, Foulkes's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide. He had his first solo presentation at the Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles (founded by Walter Hopps and Edward Kienholz) in 1961, which exhibited artists such as Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Irwin, Wallace Berman, and Bruce Conner. Subsequent museum solo shows were held at Pasadena Art Museum (1962 [now Norton Simon Museum]); Oakland Museum of California (1964); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (1978); Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, California (1996). Most recently in 2013, the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles hosted a major retrospective of the artist's work. The show traveled to the New Museum, New York and Museum Kurhaus Kleve, Germany.

Foulkes has participated in significant group exhibitions including those held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1992); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (1997); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2006); Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2008); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2009); J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2011); and François Pinault Foundation, Venice (2013). In 2011, the artist's work was included in the 54th Venice Biennale and in 2012 his work was featured in *documenta 12*, Kassel, Germany.

The artist's work is held in numerous public collections internationally, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. Foulkes lives and works in Los Angeles.

On May 6 at 4 PM, **Margot Norton** will be leading a guided tour of the exhibition. Norton is Associate Curator at the New Museum, New York, where she has recently curated and co-curated exhibitions with artists Judith Bernstein, Pia Camil, Sarah Charlesworth, Ragnar Kjartansson, Chris Ofili, Goshka Macuga, Laure Prouvost, Pipilotti Rist, and Anri Sala, and group exhibitions *The Keeper* (2016), and *Here and Elsewhere* (2014). In 2013, she organized Llyn Foulkes' retrospective exhibition at the New Museum, which traveled from the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Norton is currently working on the exhibition, *Kaari Upson: Good thing you are not alone*, which will open at the New Museum on May 3, 2017. Before she joined the New Museum, she was Curatorial Assistant at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Norton has lectured and published on contemporary art and holds an M.A. in Curatorial Studies from Columbia University, New York.

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