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Famous Art Show In Kassel

# (13)



# Der ewige Rebell

Mit 76 Jahren ist Llyn Foulkes immer noch ein Geheimtipp. Das wird sich mit seinem Auftritt in Kassel ändern. Denn der kalifornische Künstler ist nicht nur ein fantastischer Maler, sondern auch ein umwerfender Musiker

TEXT: UTE THON, PORTRÄTFOTOS: SABINA MCGREW

Llyn Foulkes in  
seinem Atelier  
in Los Angeles:  
„Ich werde alle  
zehn Jahre  
neu entdeckt“









Der Künstler als Komiker: Foulkes in einer Fotoserie aus den siebziger Jahren, als er mit seiner „Rubber Band“ auch im Fernsehen auftrat

Lyn Foulkes hat ein Problem. Er ist besser als andere Künstler. Doch das kapieren die Kuratoren, Galeristen und Sammler einfach nicht. Deshalb kriegen die anderen große Museumsausstellungen, fette Kataloge und Titelgeschichten in angesagten Kunstmagazinen, während Foulkes sich mit sporadischen Gruppen-schauen und ab und zu einer lobenden Erwähnung in der Randspalte eines Lokalblatts begnügen muss. In der Ausstellung „Under the Big Black Sun“ über die Kunstszene der siebziger Jahre in Los Angeles, die im vergangenen Herbst im Museum of Contemporary Art zu sehen war, hingen seine Bilder immerhin prominent am Eingang, und zur Vernissage wurde er vom Museumsdirektor mit Handschlag begrüßt. Doch dann blieb seine Freundin andächtig vor einem Bild von Ed Ruscha stehen. „Da hat es mir schon wieder gereicht“, sagt Foulkes. „Ich verstehe einfach nicht, was die Leute an seinen Word Paintings so toll finden, das ist doch nichts weiter als Werbefotografie.“ Ruscha, den Foulkes vom Studium kennt, sei zwar ein netter Kerl, aber kein großer Künstler. Und sein Galerist Larry Gagosian nur ein cleverer Posterverkäufer:

„Kaum zu glauben, dass so einer heute bestimmt, welchen Wert die Kunst hat.“

Mit solchen Bemerkungen macht man sich keine Freunde in der Kunstwelt. Kein Wunder also, dass die Karriere des 76-jährigen Malerrebellen aus Los Angeles einer Achterbahnfahrt gleicht. „Ich werde alle zehn Jahre neu entdeckt“, sagt Foulkes und saugt an seiner Zigarette. Mit seinen wasserblauen Augen, der drahtigen Figur und den lässigen Jeans könnte er als Paul Newman-Double durchgehen. Vielleicht kommt jetzt das große Comeback. Letzten Sommer wurden seine Bilder auf der Venedig-Biennale gezeigt, im Herbst hatte er zwei Ausstellungen in New York, und nun kommt er zur documenta nach Kassel.

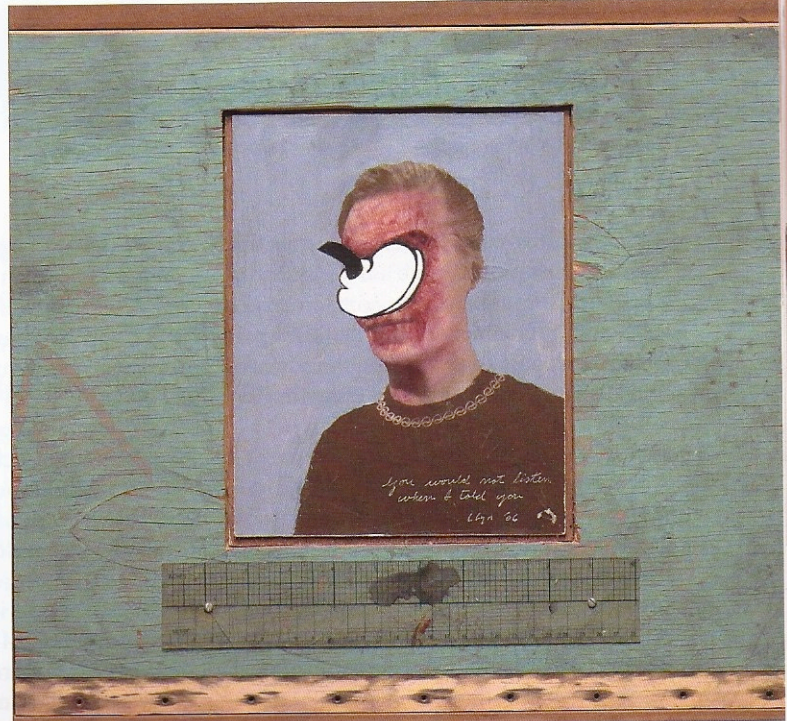
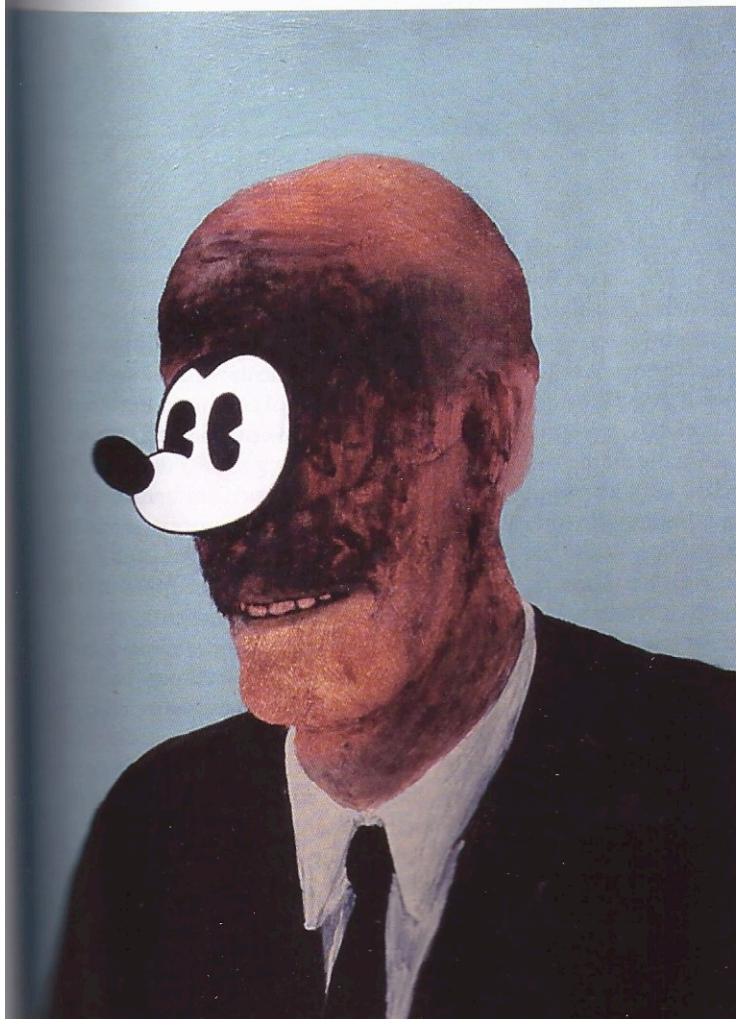
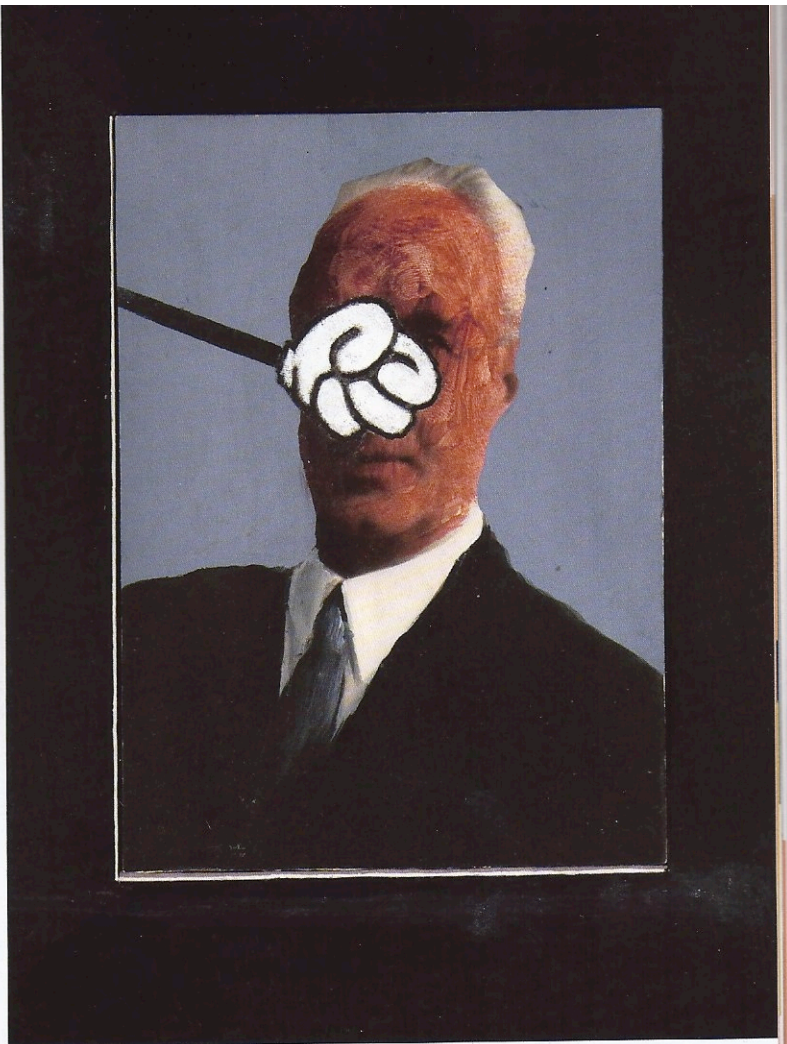
Seit dem Besuch von documenta-Leiterin Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev arbeitet Foulkes

Mit den Assemblage-Tricks kitzelt Foulkes unsere Wahrnehmung und offenbart seine Wurzeln, die in der Nachkriegs-Moderne liegen

kes fieberhaft an seinen Bildern. Sein Atelier befindet sich in der „Brewery“, einem ehemaligen Brauerei-Komplex am Rande von Chinatown, in dem sich eine quirlige Künstlerkolonie angesiedelt hat. Das Studio wirkt wie eine Mischung aus Trödelmarkt und Wunderkammer. Über dem Eingangstor wacht ein ausgestopfter Löwe, an der Wand lehnt eine durchschossene Autotür, von der Decke baumeln Walfischknochen. Auf der Empore, die Foulkes als Wohnzimmer dient, ist jeder Quadratzentimeter mit Bildern und kuriosen Fundstücken zugestrichelt: Fotografien, Tierschädel, Kreuzfixe, Schlängenskelette, Zeichnungen, Pistolen.

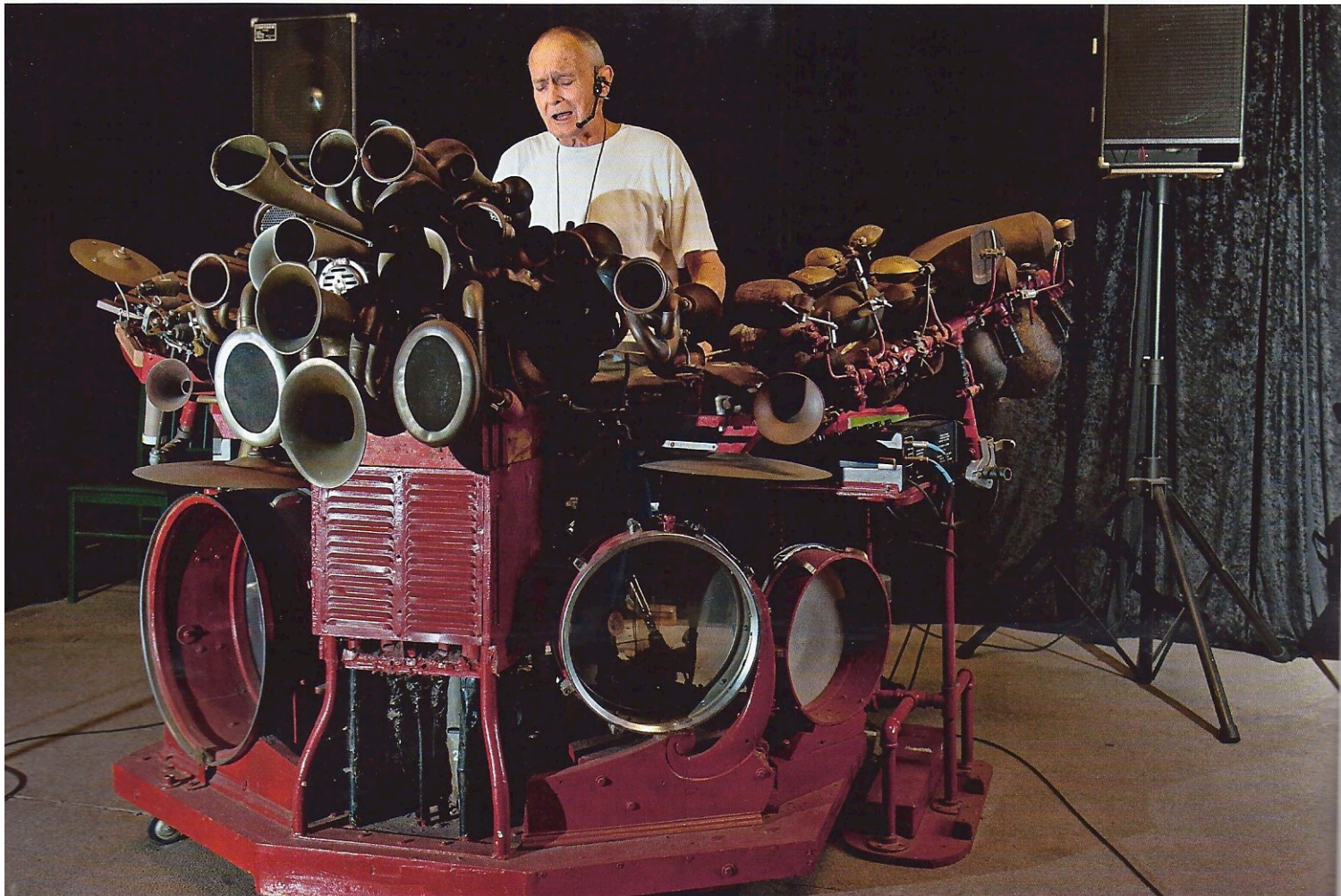
In der Werkstatt liegen mehrere halb fertige Porträts auf dem Tisch. Eine Figur trägt ein kariertes Hemd, im Mundwinkel steckt eine Zigarettenkippe, vor den Augen klebt ein blutiger Briefumschlag. Eine simple Komposition, bis man bemerkt, dass das Hemd nicht gemalt ist, sondern ein echtes Kleidungsstück mit Kragen, Brusttasche und Knopfleiste. Auch die Kippe ist echt. Mit solchen Assemblage-Tricks kitzelt Foulkes die Wahrnehmung und offenbart seine künstlerischen Wurzeln, die in der experimentierfreudigen Nachkriegsmoderne liegen. >





Porträtcollagen aus der „Bloody Heads“-Serie (im Uhrzeigersinn von links oben): „I Think It's Over“ (2007/11, 73 x 54 cm), „Portrait of Frank Gehry“ (2007/11, 26 x 20 cm), „You Would Not Listen When I Told You“ (2006, 43 x 46 cm), „Portrait of Walt Disney“ (2004/05, 51 x 41 cm)





Geborener Alleinunterhalter: Llyn Foulkes mit seiner selbstgebauten Musikmaschine, mit der er auf der documenta auftreten wird

› „Ich wollte mehr Tiefe erzeugen, als mit Öl auf Leinwand möglich ist“, erklärt der Künstler. „Diese dreidimensionalen Werke starten als Gemälde, dann arbeite ich mit der Oberfläche, indem ich sie eindrücke und ausbeule, um die Illusion eines tieferen Raums zu erzeugen.“

An seinen Bildern arbeitet Foulkes monate-, manchmal sogar jahrelang. So auch an dem Reliefbild „The Lost Frontier“ (1997/2005), das auf der documenta zu sehen sein wird. Es zeigt eine schrundige Wüstenlandschaft mit lavaähnlichen Felsformationen, Micky-Maus-Figur, Maschinengewehr und toter Katze. Die Felsen sind dreidimensional modelliert, der Katzenkadaver ein plastiniertes Original. Surreale Bildkombinationen und obskure Gesellschaftskritik sind typisch für Foulkes' Werk, Disney und seine Trickfilmhelden häufige Motive. Mal kriegt Frank Gehry die weiße Cartoon-Faust mitten ins Gesicht

gedrückt, mal liegt die Disney-Maus mit einem rauchenden Loch im Bauch am Boden. Über den kalifornischen Medienkonzern kann sich Foulkes richtig aufregen: „Es hat alles damit angefangen, dass ich das Handbuch des Micky-Maus-Clubs von 1934 gelesen habe. Da wird davon gesprochen, wie man Sachen so in die Köpfe von Kindern implantiert, dass sie unbewusst absorbiert werden. Disney hat uns alle einer Gehirnwäsche unterzogen.“

1934 ist Llyn Foulkes' Geburtsjahr. Er wächst in Yakima, im Norden Washingtons auf. Nach seiner Militärzeit schreibt er sich 1957 am Chouinard Art Institute ein, einer fortschrittlichen Kunstschule in L.A., an der auch Ruscha, Larry Bell und John Baldessari studierten. Foulkes frühe Bilder zeigen noch den Einfluss der europäischen Avantgarde, Dalí, Ernst, Magritte – und seines Helden Willem de Kooning, dem Vater des Abstrakten Expressionismus. 1959 baut Foulkes erste Bilder aus Fundobjekten: eine verkohlte

Schultafel mit einem Kinderstuhl davor, einen mit Teer beschmierten Puppenkopf unter einer Fotoreihe. Assemblage, das Zusammenwürfeln ausrangierter Dinge vom Flohmarkt, der Heilsarmee oder einfach von der Straße, wird zum Stilmittel der neuen Künstlergeneration um Wallace Berman, Robert Rauschenberg und Ed Kienholz. Doch Foulkes belässt es nicht beim Ready-Made-Effekt. Schon bald formt er rätselhafte Landschaften auf flache Bildträger, kombiniert Trompe-l'œil-Technik mit realen Gegenständen. Seine Arbeiten erregen Aufsehen. 1961 hat er die erste Ausstellung in der legendären Ferus Gallery, ein Jahr später seine erste Museumsschau. 1967 gewinnt er den Hauptpreis der Paris-Biennale. MoMA, Centre Pompidou und Guggenheim Museum erwerben seine Werke. Dann wird es still um ihn. Die Konzeptkünstler der siebziger Jahre stellen die herkömmliche Kunstproduktion in Frage und damit auch die Arbeit von Llyn Foulkes, der an die Me-





Reliefbild mit Micky-Maus und toter Katze: „The Lost Frontier“ (1997/2005, 221 x 244 cm)

die des einzigartigen, in Handarbeit hergestellten Kunstobjekts glaubt.

Dass Foulkes nicht zum internationalen Star aufsteigt, liegt aber nicht nur am wechselnden Geschmack des Kunstmarkts, sondern auch an seinem Eigensinn. „Llyn ist so etwas wie ein einsamer Rächer. Er macht sein eigenes Ding, folgt keinen Trends und spielt nicht das Networking-Spiel“, sagt Ali Subotnick. Die junge Museumskuratorin hat Foulkes' Arbeiten vor fünf Jahren entdeckt. Jetzt bereitet sie für 2013 eine große Retrospektive im Hammer Museum in L.A. vor. Sie war es auch, die die documenta-Chefin in Foulkes' Atelier führte. „Das hat sie total umgehauen. Sein Werk versetzt die Welt in Schwingung. Es reflektiert den zerbrochenen amerikanischen Traum und die Sehnsucht nach der verlorenen Zeit.“

Das mit den Schwingungen darf man wirklich nehmen. Foulkes überraschte Christian Bakargiev mit einer Musikeinlage auf seiner „Machine“. Das knallrote Ein-Mann-

**Dass Foulkes nicht zum Star aufsteigt, liegt nicht nur am wechselnden Geschmack des Markts, sondern auch an seinem Eigensinn**

Orchester, eine aberwitzige Konstruktion aus alten Autohupen, Kuhglocken, Xylophon, Drums und integrierter Bassgeige, steht in einem Raum neben dem Atelier – seiner „Church of Art“ – und ist integraler Bestandteil seines Kunstuniversums. In seiner Jugend spielte Foulkes professionell Schlagzeug, in den siebziger Jahren hatte er mit seiner „Rubber Band“ sogar einen Auftritt mit den „Doors“. Heute spielt er seine Musikmaschine nur noch zur Entspannung. Wenn er den Rythmus auf den Kuhglocken schlägt, mit den Füßen die Bassseite bedient und mit den Hupen Bläsersätze imitiert,

wird aus dem rauhbeinigen Künstler ein geschmeidiger Performer, der mit jazziger Sinatra-Stimme selbstkomponierte Lieder singt: „There is a ghost in Hollywood. I see him every night. He walks alone. He's made of bone and skin all shiny white ...“

Das wird er demnächst auch in Kassel singen. Die documenta zeigt nicht nur seine Bilder. In den ersten 30 Tagen wird er täglich Konzerte auf der „Machine“ geben – eine neue Herausforderung, auf die er sich freut. Denn, so Foulkes, „die Kunst ist mein Problem, die Musik mein Vergnügen.“

Auch die Sache mit der fehlenden Anerkennung scheint sich zu wenden. Andere Künstler mögen immer noch höhere Preise erzielen. Doch als das Kunstmagazin „Art in America“ kürzlich die wichtigsten Künstler aus L.A. vorstellte, war Foulkes auf dem Cover. Sein Name ganz oben – noch über dem von Ed Ruscha. **a**

Galerie: <http://kentfineart.net>



First encounter with the mysteries of the universe. In front of the entrance to the Planetarium lie three meteorites from the Campo del Cielo—an other two and a half, as Faivovich and Goldberg found out. This is because El Taco, a block of iron and nickel weighing more than a tonne and a half and found in 1962, has been sawn in two. The other half is now at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C., where it was sent for investigation in 1963 at the height of the US-Russian space race.

In 2010 Faivovich and Goldberg succeeded in bringing the two pieces together again for the duration of an exhibition in Germany, the very place where the Americans had had it sawn in two in 1965. People flocked to the Porticus Frankfurt, eager to see the reunited El Taco, a piece of heaven-cum-temporary art work. The two halves have since been separated again, but at least the first chapter of the Campo del Cielo project is complete. A triumph for two young artists whom no one had wanted to take seriously—especially not in their native Argentina. Following the Frankfurt exhibition, they were invited to give seminars and lectures all over the world. “What’s more,” Faivovich adds, “the Argentinian government, scientists, and public became aware of the treasures lying on the Campo del Cielo.”

The next stop on our tour is Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires’ former docks, whose warehouses now house elegant restaurants and clubs. Sold mainly to foreigners, the new apartments afford splendid views onto the Rio de la Plata—and onto the rather dismal buildings that once housed a branch of the State Institute of Geology and Mining, which twenty years ago had hundreds of scientists on its payroll. Owing to drastic cuts to the research budget under neoliberal President Menem, however, there are just four people working there today. One of them is Diego Patricio Fernandez, whose curiosity was aroused by a photograph in the artists’ book showing a historic expedition of the 1920s. He began to investigate and soon found real treasure in one of the buildings: more than thirty thousand historical negatives of geological peculiarities strewn all over Argentina.

Goldberg is triumphant. “This shows what our work as artists is all about. If you delve into the history of the Campo del Cielo you often find things you weren’t even looking for.” The other three employees of the geological institute had been using the prints as fuel for their barbecues for years. Now Diego Fernandez has taken on the job of ordering the negatives and archiving them in newly purchased cabinets, and he has even been promised an assistant. The officials at the Ministry of Science seem to have woken up, as have their colleagues at the Ministry of Defense.

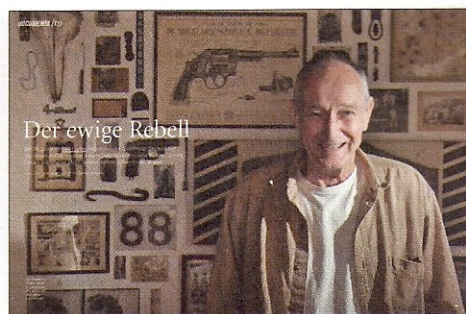
Our next port of call is the Belgrano district. Located behind well-guarded barriers on the Avenida Cabildo is the future counseling center for veterans of the Falklands War together with a small library specializing in geology. Here the artists found a map dated 1883 made for an Argentinian military campaign to wipe out the indigenous Indian population. The campaign was certainly successful: there are hardly any Indian tribes still living in Argentina today, making it the only country in South America where white settlers and the indigenous population never mixed. During that same military campaign, an expedition was sent to the Campo del Cielo to locate the most important meteorite finds, including El Mesón de Fierro (House of Iron). This huge, powerfully magnetic block is mentioned in the writings of the seventeenth-century Jesuit padre who wrote down the oral tradition of the Guaycurú Indios. Since then, the Mesón de Fierro has disappeared—perhaps buried or perhaps stolen by American meteorite hunters and sold on the international black market. Military campaigns, Indios, pillaging—the more one pokes around in the history of the Campo del Cielo, the more bewildering it gets.

As Faivovich and Goldberg were also to find out. At the last stop on our city tour, the Club Alemán on the twenty-third floor of a tower block on the Avenida Corrientes, they tell me how their project to bring El Chaco to Kassel came to fail. The provincial government had passed a special law for the duration of the exhibition, the documenta director had traveled to Argentina and received the go-ahead from the Indios’ Council of Elders, and everything seemed to be signed and sealed. The military had agreed to transport the meteorite to Buenos Aires on a trailer, and from there it was to be shipped to Europe on a container ship free of charge. But then some Indian separatists who didn’t actually live anywhere near the Campo del Cielo got wind of the plan, egged on by a dubious ethno-astronomer who railed that the loss of El Chaco’s magnetic radiation for the 100 days that the meteorite was to spend at documenta would seriously upset the natural equilibrium. There were press campaigns and a small demonstration, and when even the local politicians began to fret, the artists decided to call a halt to the project.

So that is why there will be no El Chaco lying in front of the Fridericianum in June. “What really counts,” Nicolas Goldberg insists, “is the process we set in motion, which is what led to this farce based on a false idea of democracy.” So this is what the artists plan to present to the public in Kassel, illustrated with photos, documents, and maps. After that they will embark on part three of their Campo del Cielo project: the search for the legendary Mesón de Fierro. Another Sisyphean endeavor?

HEINZ PETER SCHWERFEL

Literature: *The Campo del Cielo Meteorites – Volume 1: El Taco* is published by Hatje Cantz and costs €39.80.



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## The Eternal Rebel

At seventy-six, Llyn Foulkes still counts as an insider tip. But his participation in documenta is likely to change all that. Because Foulkes is not just a fantastic painter, but a mind-blowing musician, too

Llyn Foulkes has a problem. He is better than other artists. Only the curators, gallerists, and collectors just don’t get it. Which is why all the great shows, all the big glossy catalogues, and all the lead stories in the major art magazines go to the others, while Foulkes has to make do with the occasional group exhibit and now and then an honorary mention in the marginalia of some local rag. At least his works had pride of place at *Under the Big Black Sun*, a show about the Los Angeles art scene of the 1970s held last autumn at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and at least the museum’s director deigned to shake Foulkes’s hand at the opening event. But then he saw his girlfriend pause reverentially in front of a painting by Ed Ruscha: “That was it for me and I had to leave,” says Foulkes. “I don’t know why people are so crazy about his work, it’s graphic design, nothing more.” Foulkes has known Ruscha since student days and describes him as a nice enough fellow, but no great artist. His gallerist, Larry Gagosian, just happens to be “a poster dealer with a business diploma.” That “people like him have the power to decide on the value of art” is something Foulkes finds hard to swallow.

Remarks like this are scarcely the right way to win friends and influence people in the art world. Little wonder that the career of this eternal rebel from L.A. has been such a rollercoaster ride. “I get rediscovered every ten years,” says Foulkes, drawing hard on his cigarette. With his baby-blue eyes, wiry physique, and laid-back jeans, he could pass for a Paul Newman double. Perhaps his great comeback is just around the corner. He had paintings at the Venice Biennale last summer, two shows in New York last autumn, and is coming to documenta in Kassel this June. >



› Foulkes has been working flat out on his paintings ever since Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, artistic director of this year's documenta, paid him a visit. His studio is in The Brewery, a complex on the fringes of Chinatown that has become a kind of oddball artists' colony. The studio itself is a flea market-cum-cabinet of curiosities: A stuffed lion stands guard over the entrance; a car door peppered with bullet holes is propped against the wall; whale bones dangle from the ceiling. Every inch of the gallery that serves Foulkes as living space is crammed full of pictures and bric-a-brac ranging from photographs, animal skulls, and crucifixes to snake skeletons, drawings, and pistols.

The table is strewn with several half-finished portraits. One shows a figure clad in a checkered shirt, a cigarette butt hanging from the corner of his mouth, a blood-stained envelope stuck to his eyes. The composition looks simple enough until you notice that the shirt is not painted at all, but is in fact the real thing complete with collar, breast pocket, and buttons. Even the cigarette butt is real. Foulkes relishes perceptual tricks like this, which also tell us a lot about his own roots in the experimental modernism of the postwar years. "I wanted more dimension than oil on canvas would allow," the artist explains. "These dimensional pieces start like paintings and then I work with the surface, pushing and pulling it to create the illusion of a deeper space."

Foulkes can work on a picture for months—even years—at a time. Take his relief of *The Lost Frontier* (1997–2005), for example, which will be on display at documenta. It shows a rugged desert landscape with lava-like rock formations, a machine gun, a dead cat, and—Mickey Mouse. The rocks are modeled in the round and even the dead cat is a plastinated original. Surrealistic image combinations and obscure social critique are typical of Foulkes, just as Disney and his cartoon characters rank among his favorite motifs. In one work we see Frank Gehry getting punched in the face by a white cartoon fist, while another shows Mickey Mouse lying supine on the floor with a smoking hole in his famous pot belly. The Disney Corporation is one of Foulkes's favorite *bête noires*: "It all started when I read the first page from the Mickey Mouse Club handbook written in 1934. They talked about how they implant things in children's minds so they absorb them almost unconsciously... Everybody's brainwashed by Disney."

Llyn Foulkes was born in 1934 and grew up in Yakima, Washington. After a stint in the military he enrolled at the Chouinard Art Institute in L.A. in 1957 and there studied alongside Ruscha as well as Larry Bell and John Baldessari. Foulkes's early pictures show the influence of the European

avant-garde, especially of Dali, Ernst, Magritte, and his special hero Willem de Kooning, the father of Abstract Expressionism. His first pictures made of found objects date from 1959 and include a carbonized blackboard with a child's chair in front of it, and a doll's head smeared with tar placed below a sequence of photos. Assemblage—the technique of throwing together miscellaneous items procured from flea markets, thrift stores, or simply picked off the streets—was to become the stylistic idiom of a whole new generation of artists centered on Wallace Berman, Robert Rauschenberg, and Ed Kienholz. But Foulkes didn't stop at the readymade effect. Before long he was using flat supports to build mysterious landscapes that combined *trompe l'œil* technique with real objects. His works attracted notice and in 1961 he had his first exhibition at the now legendary Ferus Gallery, followed a year later by his first show at a museum. Foulkes won the grand prix of the Paris Biennale 1967 and before long was able to add the MoMA, Centre Pompidou, and Guggenheim Museum to his list of clients. And then the line went dead. The conceptualists of the 1970s cast doubt on all forms of conventional art production and hence on the works of Llyn Foulkes, too, who unlike them had never lost his faith in the magic of the unique, handcrafted work of art.

That Foulkes never became an international star cannot be blamed solely on the vicissitudes of the art market, however; it also has to do with his uncompromising individualism. "Llyn is not an outsider, he is more like a lone ranger. He does his own thing, and doesn't like to follow trends or play the networking game. He couldn't care less who is who; he just wants to make his work and get it out there," says Ali Subotnick, the young curator who discovered Foulkes's work five years ago, and who is now preparing a major retrospective for 2013 at the Hammer Museum in L.A. She was the one who escorted documenta director Christov-Bakargiev to his studio. "She was totally floored like I was when I first met him," recalls Subotnick. "The work resonates with the world we're living in—it reflects the broken American dream and nostalgia for a lost time."

The bit about the work resonating was meant literally: Foulkes apparently treated Christov-Bakargiev to a musical interlude played on the bright red one-man band that he fondly refers to as his "machine." This bizarre contraption made of old car horns, cow bells, drums, a xylophone, and integrated bass is housed in the "Church of Art" adjoining his studio and is an integral part of his artistic universe. Foulkes was a professional drummer in his youth and he and his Rubber Band even played a gig with The Doors in the 1970s. These days, however, he plays his machine just for fun, hammering out rhythms on the cow bells, strumming the bass with his feet, and imitating an entire brass section with his collection of car horns. He may have rough edges as an artist, but Foulkes the

musician is a smooth performer who sings his own songs with a voice like Sinatra's: "There is a ghost in Hollywood. I see him every night. He walks alone. He's made of bone and skin all shiny white..."

Which is the one he'll be singing in Kassel, too. So there will be more than just pictures to marvel at, at this year's documenta. The daily performances on the "machine" scheduled for the first three days of the show present a challenge that Foulkes very much looking forward to, since "the artwork gives me headaches, the music gives me pleasure."

Even that problem with lack of recognition appears to be righting itself. Other artists may still be able to fetch higher prices, but when the monthly *Art in America* recently devoted a whole issue to the most important artists in L.A., Foulkes made it onto the cover. In fact, his name was right there at the top, ahead of Ed Ruscha.

UTE THOMAS

Gallery: <http://kentfineart.net>



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## The Irresistibility of Red

She paints and draws, writes poetry and prose: Etel Adnan, born in Beirut in 1925, is among the most versatile artists working today. A conversation about art in troubled times

The Lebanese poet and artist Etel Adnan was born in Beirut in 1925. Thanks to her Greek Christian mother and Syrian Moslem father, she is accustomed to shuttling back and forth between cultures. Three places stand out in her biography: Beirut, where she grew up and attended a French convent school; Paris, which she still likes to visit; and where from 1949 to 1955 she was a student at the Sorbonne; and San Rafael California, where from 1958 to 1972 she taught humanities at the