Foreword

Albany is a fitting place to present the work of Rachel Foullon, an artist most recently inspired by the early Dutch barns that still dot our rural upstate landscape. She finds inspiration in the simple elegance of these structures, threatened reminders of a pre-industrial agricultural society that once flourished here, as well as in the concepts they embody: home to family and farm animals, storage for food and fodder, literal warehouses for the tools to cultivate a land that was both rich and abundant. But Foullon shuns nostalgia; her sculptures conjure up a hard life, one that also serves as an arresting metaphor for the life of an artist in which the threads of life and work so often intertwine.

Generous grants from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and the Elsworth Kelly Foundation have made this exhibition catalogue possible. We are indebted to both for understanding the role museum publications play in documenting an exhibition and illuminating the work presented.

Additional support for the exhibition was provided by The University at Albany Foundation and University Auxiliary Services. Rachel Foullon was inspired by architect Edward Durell Stone’s interior of the University Art Museum to adapt existing works and create new work for the exhibition space, and a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant supported her efforts.

I am deeply grateful to University at Albany President George M. Philip and to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Susan D. Phillips for their ongoing support of the museum. Special thanks to Senior Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs William B. Hedberg for his confidence and his guidance.

The museum staff brings to every project exacting standards, problem-solving skills, and enough hard work to make a Dutch farmer proud. Thanks go to Corinna Ripps Schaming for keen curatorial supervision, Zheng Hu for inspired exhibition and catalogue design, Jeffrey Wright-Sedam for meeting every installation challenge, Darcie Abbatiello for the exactitude required of a registrar, Ryan Parr for creative web design, Naomi Lewis for exceptional organizational and outreach oversight, and Joanne Lue for adept administrative support.

Sincere thanks go to essayists Todd Alden and Elizabeth A.T. Smith for their insights; to Susan Harris, Christine A. Zehner and one anonymous lender for generously making work available for the exhibition; to Shirley Morales for her enthusiastic support of Rachel and her work; and to Ian Cooper, Jeanne Finley, Charles Gehrning, Gary David Gold, and Chloe Pfeider for exhibition and catalogue support.

Finally, I am grateful to Rachel Foullon for her tireless efforts and for caring so deeply about everything involved with this exhibition. But I am most thankful for the world of ideas she represents in work that is refined in form, yet speaks so eloquently about the stuff of life itself: all that is messy, unruly, and transitory.

Janet Riker
Director
There's No Place Like This Place: Rachel Foullon's Poetic Archeology

Todd Alden

Edward Durell Stone (1902-1978) was the design architect for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Opened in 1939, it was “the first museum in America to be built according to the stream-lined, ultra modern, ‘International Style’ of modern architecture.” Stone’s later buildings, however, including the museum and uptown campus of the University at Albany (opened in 1966-67), eschewed the “mannerisms of the moment” and marked a sharp turn away from the modern “International Style” toward an evolving embrace of vernacular architectural forms. “I believe the inspiration for a building,” he wrote in 1962 “should be in the accumulation of history.” So much for the shock of the new.

Like Stone, Rachel Foullon’s work also embraces unexpected contradictions of form, material, and history. (Even her perplexing title of the exhibition, Braided Sun, would seem to announce this.) While she is clearly indebted to the process-oriented legacy of post-Minimalist sculpture, she also draws practical and architectural inspiration from the legacy of Dutch Barn architecture and the American “landscape of self-reliance”—real and imagined—of early rural people. The artist’s sources include discoveries at agrarian fairs, vintage tools and remnants found in New York State barns, and images gleaned from Dust Bowl-era Sears catalogues. With these, Foullon repurposes her collection of barnyard detritus and pioneering oddments—leftover tools, rope, hoses, cut-and-sewn garments—into her floor-and wall-based installations, some of which consist of alterations of even her own prior work. Historical materials are deployed to resignify the objects of agrarian civilization as surprising hybrids and eccentric abstractions. To everything there is a season: turn, turn, turn.

Foullon’s system of wall-bound objects frequently incorporates carefully crafted cedar moldings fastened with blackened hardware and punctuated with oversized nails or pegs. Composed with a formal rigor and lyrical elegance, Foullon’s techniques are also reminiscent of the post-Minimalist strategies of, for example, Robert Morris (b. 1931) and Eva Hesse (1936–1970), due to their emphasis on uncanny materiality, process, and relationship to the body.

Along with most of Foullon’s work from the last few years, the work titled Hallenhaus (and the severance of our own ties to the land) (2008) draws particular inspiration from rural, vernacular Dutch barn architecture. Characteristically, Foullon’s environments do not aim to reconstruct the Dutch barn form with historical accuracy (as, for example, the New England museum at Colonial Williamsburg purports to do), but instead do something else. Before unpacking what makes Foullon’s gambit different—along with her abstracting forms—it is useful to consider the history and rhetoric of vernacular Dutch barns.

Distinct in type and history from their New England counterparts, most were located east of the Hudson River and built before the American Revolution. “Many of the early settlers of New York were from New England,” according to American essayist John Burroughs (1837–1921). “But the State [New York] early had one element introduced into its rural and farm life not found farther east, namely, the Holland Dutch. These gave features more or less picturesque to the country that are not observable in New England. The Dutch took roots at various points along the Hudson, and about Albany, and in the Mohawk Valley, and remnants of their rural and domestic architecture may still be seen in sections of the State. A Dutch barn became proverbial... The main feature of these barns was their enormous expansion of roof.” Superficially, the exterior of a Dutch barn is delineated by a steeply gabled roof and by non-structural, unpainted wooden walls. Just about the oldest and rarest architecture in America, only about 600 Dutch barns are said to exist today in varying states of decay, making it a disappearing vernacular.

Hallenhaus (and the severance of our own ties to the land) doesn’t suggest a historical reconstruction—the characteristic steeply gabled roof is entirely absent—as much as it suggests a vision of an inside-out dreamscape that incorporates Dutch barn elements. The finely hewn 1970s photographs of hallenhaus survey in Montgomery County, New York. Courtesy of the New Netherland Research Center

I try to find an architecture that is hopefully timeless, free of the mannerisms of the moment.

—Edward Durell Stone

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Inaugural exhibition, Painting and Sculpture from the Nelson A. Rockefeller Collection, October 5–November 17, 1967
walls—dramatically diminished in scale from that of a working barn—are composed of western red cedar planks, which are somehow both fitting and out of place. On the exterior side, a giant, nail-like piece of hardware extrudes from the wall—a hanging device for three sewn, stained, rolled, salted, and tied pieces of canvas, which suggest over-sized, apparently “sweat-laden” bandanas (the “sweat” is suggested by the encrusted presence of sea salt). The work’s title and the severance of our own ties to the land references, and the work itself re-enacts, the dislocation of forms and functions: from barn to sculpture to museum. Darkly lyrical, Foulon’s sculptures also plumb psychological dislocation too, collapsing inside and outside, past and present, the real and the imaginary.

As it happens, New World Dutch barns are directly descended from hallenhuis—Old World Dutch barns in which living quarters for animals and humans are non-differentiated. This structural anomaly distinguishes this rural barn type from virtually every other form of Western architecture, in which humans and animals are otherwise quartered separately. With this history in mind, Foulon’s Hallenhaus might suggest for some viewers the presence of the uncanny, the disturbing province of aesthetics that is characterized by the destabilizing collapse of the strange and familiar. The artist’s use of surprising alterations of scale—making large objects unexpectedly small, or diminutive objects unexpectedly heroic—also serves to size up the uncanny effect.

What further distinguishes the vernacular hallenhuis structure from nearly all other pre-twentieth-century architecture is its otherwise “revealed structure”—its interior’s openly visible, unconcealed, supporting complex of wood beams and joints, along with its array of “unfinished” details that professional architecture always covers, hides, or masks. These functional elements belonging to the syntax of barn “unfinished” details that professional architecture always covers, hides, or masks.

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covered with sea salt to simulate the sweat of a giant human brow? For Albany (Bandana) is an “epic symbol of sweat and labor,” says the artist, “as well as a portal through which the viewer can imagine passing.” Perhaps the bandana is more twisted than braided, but against the backdrop of the museum’s soaring windows it is easy to imagine that it also suggests the timeless “braided sun” of the exhibition’s title.

Collapsing the aesthetic space of the museum with the purportedly functional barn storage architecture and its accoutrements, Foullon turns the viewer’s expectations on their head. Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that the most frequently asked question of the artist is: “Did you grow up on a farm?” (She did not.) I believe viewers ask this because her work (the materials, the historical referents, the shifting elements) defies expectations of professional art, but also because the material, historical, and narrative uncertainty that permeates her installations can also be unsettling: we are never quite sure which elements are “real” and vintage/authentic and which are ersatz/new. Perhaps it is in the narrative uncertainty and material vagaries of Foullon’s “romantic historicism” where our interest in the artist’s work is most piqued.

Although she frequently works in a studio in a Deposit, New York barn near the Catskills (at the farm formerly belonging to artist Frank Moore [1953–2002]), and draws some of her source materials from up-state barns, Foullon was raised in a family of architects and engineers in Los Angeles under the sign of Hollywood (and not too far from the Hollywood sign itself). The latter is reminiscent, in fact, of my favorite piece by Foullon. Diminutive in scale (as opposed to the oversized Hollywood sign), this collaged paper sculpture comprises an approximately 4” x 6” sign hanging in two sections—one above the other—from miniature metal hooks attached to a paper-wrapped metal wire painted gold into the wall.4 The larger sign on the top, with a red ground and white letters, reads: “THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE THIS PLACE ANYWHERE NEAR THIS PLACE SO THIS MUST BE,” while the smaller sign below is blue with white and slightly larger letters, and reads: “THE PLACE.” Particularly nifty about There is No Place Like This Place Anywhere Near This Place So This Must be the Place (2001) is its crafty celebration of the rhetoric of homespun, vernacular signs—emphasized, of course, by its unfinished, hand-crafted elements but also by its peculiar miniaturization. But the piece de résistance of Foullon’s vernacular transfiguration is her ingenious rendering of the final exclamation point, the definitive point of arrival—“THE PLACE”—on a separate, differently colored, detachable sign! While Foullon’s work appears to point toward a desire for authenticity and particularity of place in an increasingly universal and homogeneous world, it also points out that even this definitive point of destination may always already be subject to shifting signs over time.

Foullon’s practice eschews “the mannerisms of the moment”; she prefers instead a kind of romantic historicism that might be described as a research-based poetic archeology. Braided Sun re-imagines hardships of the agrarian “landscape of self-reliance.” On the one hand, her work can be read as darkly ciphered parables: “There are specific periods of American history that haunt me,” she notes, “particularly instances of pioneering farmsteads when adventurous, hard-working people sought to carve out new and original lives for themselves, often in an inhospitable environment.” But on the other hand, although they contain found elements and historical dimensions, all signs also point toward one ineluctable fact: Foullon’s installations are fictions, too. As the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976) reminds us: “Fiction enables us to grasp reality and at the same time that which is veiled by reality.”

4. A number of “sculptural components,” as the artist refers to them—essentially carved fragments of prior works—hang on storage display systems and have been previously exhibited in substantially different forms and manner.
5. John Burroughs, quoted by John Fishkin in The New World Dutch Farm (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p. 71. I am grateful to Rachel Foullon for directing me to this reference.
6. While there is not space here for a longer discussion of the role that functionalist aesthetics, high-level craftsmanship, and furniture-making plays in Foullon’s approach to making sculpture, it is significant to note the hands-on influence that her father-in-law, James Cooper (b. 1949), has exerted on her approach to working with wood. It is worth noting that Cooper, the Soho-based master cabinet maker, played what remains an under-chronicled role as publisher/fabricant of furniture editions by Donald Judd (1928–1994), with whom he was associated from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s (first as Cooper/Wilkins, later as Cooper/Katov). The vast differences between the limited Judd editions originally produced by Cooper’s publishing/fabrication venture, Cooper/Katov, and the unlimited Judd editions fabricated later by others, remains a ripe subject for another occasion.
7. As a courtesy to the artist, I note Steinbach’s objection to my description here of elements of his work incorporating “commodity objects”: “he prefers ‘everyday objects’ instead.”
8. Another example is Cemetery Ring (Oxford) (2005), consisting of a life-size, finger-size sculptural ring constructed entirely of paper hanging on a three-inch nail in an unexpected nook of the exhibition and suggesting a darkly romantic narrative laid to rest on an uncertain plot.
10. Full disclosure: I own this work.
Commensurate with Modern Progress, 2010
Canvas, bilateral red cypress, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware
13 feet x 116 feet x 17 inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Cluster XVI, 2012
Found garden hose and dented vintage bag with stuffing on cedar peg and molding, 27 x 20 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster (Commensurate with Modern Progress), 2012
Existing sculptural component (2010), dyed canvas, sea salt, hardware, manila rope, plastic E-collar on cedar peg and molding, 125 x 28 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Cluster, 2012
Installation view
University Art Museum, University at Albany
Cluster (the wrong place, the wrong time, in a sort of rapture), 2012
Existing sculptural component (2009), manila rope, dyed vintage apron, and steel hoop on two cedar pegs and molding, 89 x 48 x 9 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster IX, 2012
Dyed vintage coverall, socks, and found rope on cedar peg and molding, 40 x 20 x 8 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Cluster (Possesion), 2012
Existing sculptural component (2009), wool cloth, aircraft cable, and wreath form on cedar peg and molding, 44 x 22 x 9 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster VIII, 2012
Dyed canvas, found garden hose, and gloves on three cedar pegs and molding, 96 x 64 x 12 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Cluster IV, 2012
Dyed cotton rope, dyed denim pant leg, and found lighting cord on cedar peg and molding, 9 3/4 x 11 x 9 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster II, 2012
Existing sculptural component (2009) and dyed canvas on cedar peg and molding, 84 x 32 x 13 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Cluster XIX, 2012
Dyed canvas, cotton gloves, cotton rope, and found electrical cord on cedar peg and molding, 54 x 23 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Crucial Radiance (Buck Saw II), 2012
Antique buck saw, polished nickel-plated brass, dyed linen, and hardware, 25 x 23 ½ x 1½ inches
Collection of Susan Harris
Cruel Radiance (Washboard), 2012
Antique washboard, polished nickel-plated brass, dyed canvas, and hardware, 27 x 27 x 4½ inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cruel Radiance (Seed Sower), 2012
Antique seed sower, polished nickel-plated brass, dyed canvas, and hardware, 35 x 28 x 7 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Electric Fence, 2011
Stained cedar, dyed canvas, and hardware, 35 x 42 x 4 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
For Albany (Blondie), 2012
Canvas, vintage eastern white pine, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware, 22 feet x 18 feet x 16 inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
There was at this time no specific room for sleeping in, 2009
Canvas, blond red cedar, rope, stain, sea salt, and hardware
89 x 70 x 6 inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
Great Plains, gold dust, 2019
Canvas, inland red cedars, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware
89 x 140 x 5½ inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
For Albany (Dickie), 2012
Canvas, vintage eastern white pine, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware, 18 feet x 18 feet x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California
This is always there (near Jewett), 2003–06
Paper and glue, 36 x 9 x 2 inches. Private collection

Hallenhaus (and the severance of our own ties to the land), 2008
Western red cedar, canvas, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware,
84 x 48 x 144 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Hallenhaus, 2008
Western red cedar, canvas, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware,
84 x 48 x 144 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California
**In the American Grain: Rachel Foullon’s Braided Sun**

Elizabeth A. T. Smith

I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum... I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary... I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spills and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself.

— Claes Oldenburg, 1961

The exhibition Braided Sun presents almost a decade of work by California-born, New York-based artist Rachel Foullon, and represents the ongoing explorations of an artist whose work vigorously grapples with the expressive possibilities of form and its particularly American cultural significance. Freeform and buoyant, composed of sculptures that are discrete objects but which interrelate as installations, the works signal connections to one another, to the architecture of the museum space, and to American identity.

Foullon deftly orchestrates the formal attributes of scale, compositional relationships, texture, and color with a keen attention to the properties of gravity and balance. Through her recombinant objects, materials, and methods, she addresses the meaning and purpose of functionality, inventiveness, ingenuity, craftsmanship, and work ethic, simultaneously invigorating and interrogating these qualities. The largest and newest pieces in the exhibition, made in response to the museum’s architecture, expand these references in both their physical form and their emphatic evocation of social and cultural narratives.

Many of the sculptures in Braided Sun—made of fabric, tools, and objects such as rope, garden hoses, wire, work gloves, and a plethora of related items—are intertwined as loose configurations suggestive of the human body and attributes of physical labor. Most of the fabric elements, strongly tied to vernacular culture and to a folk sensibility, are designed and sewn in Foullon’s studio and were inspired by historical patterns, photographs, or illustrations. Grouped within wood-worked moldings that form a framework, they resemble items that one might find hung by the doorway of a barn or left behind by workers who have gone home for the evening. Yet they resonate with an improvisatory, anticipatory air, as if they are also stand-ins for the artist’s tools and processes.

Throughout her body of recent work, Foullon has directly engaged with the implications of several chapters in American social history and with the notion of what it means to make “American” art in the twenty-first century. She understands that a responsiveness to a particular arrangement of circumstances, a dependence upon infinite variables, and the dynamism generated from such constantly shifting relationships are inherently American attributes that have underpinned our national identity over time. Echoes of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl are present, and it is intriguing to observe how Foullon’s work resonates with the figurative paintings of Thomas Hart Benton, whose Social Realism of the 1930s centered largely on images of small-town and rural life as embodied in people, labor, and rituals. Both artists also share a penchant for the dramatic and the heroic, as well as a hyper-rich palette that serves to electrify these narratives. Foullon has delved into a little-known episode of early American vernacular culture—a type of barn architecture imported by Dutch settlers in the seventeenth century to the east coast of North America—as an ongoing touchstone for her own artistic production. She explores the connections between the messy vitality of cohabitating humans and animals and the realities of contemporary “live-work” spaces such as the artist’s studio, using sculptural production as a means to make her subject matter current and relevant.

Thus Foullon’s work has larger implications for an evolving definition of American art’s signs, symbols, and cultural significance. Her use of references to earlier episodes in the country’s history, and her insistence on an impeccable craftsmanship, resonate with writer Louis Uchitelle’s observation that “mastering tools and working with one’s hands is receding in America as a hobby, as a valued skill, as a cultural influence that shaped thinking and behavior in vast sections of the country...craftsmanship is, if not a birthright, then a vital ingredient.
of the American self-image as a can-do, inventive, we-can-make-anything-people. Foullon’s work spotlights this deeply ingrained aspect of American identity. The discipline inherent in many of her pieces, together with their often exuberant conjoining of objects that are seemingly casually assembled, speaks to the transformation of materials through labor, the tradition of agrarian living, and the possibilities of an art that is broadly referential to other recent practices in multiple disciplines. For example, the garments she creates—meticulously researched, sewn from scratch, and hand-dyed—are evidence of her deliberate adoption of a thoughtful, calculated approach. The wood in her pieces is finely milled and stained; the hardware has been transformed by being stripped and blackened. She comments that her approach is like that of labor on a farm where “everything gets formed by being stripped and blackened. She comments that her laborer and the “gentleman farmer”—both noble archetypes in American cultural history, but both also metaphors for the conflicting dual identities held by the contemporary artist as laborer and “high-society participant.” In this context, it is instructive to consider the shared affinities of Foullon’s explorations and those of painter Philip Guston, whose renditions of cartoonish human figures carry references to social forces as well as to the struggles of the artist, merging them in complex, contradictory ways.

A notable material element of Foullon’s sculptures is the presence of utilitarian garments and accouterments associated with workman-like yet gender-neutral labor, which offer protection from and barriers between worker, animal, natural elements, bodily fluids, etc. In the two new installation pieces created for Braided Sun, which Foullon has rendered in a less-detailed, more schematic way than previous pieces, she expands her vocabulary of forms and her use of scale. These new works are larger and more monumental than any of her earlier works, appearing heavy and almost perversely corporeal. Her use of the motifs of the bandana, associated with toil, and the collar-like dickie, with its more refined associations, speaks to the coexistence of the laborer and the “gentleman farmer”—both noble archetypes in American cultural history, but both also metaphors for the conflicting dual identities held by the contemporary artist as laborer and “high-society participant.” In this context, it is instructive to consider the shared affinities of Foullon’s explorations and those of painter Philip Guston, whose renditions of cartoonish human figures carry references to social forces as well as to the struggles of the artist, merging them in complex, contradictory ways.

Foullon’s work reveals an attitude that seems closest in spirit to that of the early Claes Oldenburg, an artist she admires for his inventive mixture of materials, the animated theatricality of his work, and what she terms the “pathetic quality that speaks to the flaccid character of all heroes when their moment of agency has passed.” Ephemeral, contingency, and precarious balance animate Foullon’s work in ways that are akin to Oldenburg’s experiments with the properties of gravity in his soft sculptures and suspended installations. In the implied presence of the body in motion, its sense of syncopation, and use of vernacular American references, Foullon’s work additionally suggests relationships to dance and performance. For instance, choreographer Martha Graham’s 1944 ballet, Appalachian Spring, with its lyrical exuberance and American folkloric inspiration, manifests a kinship of sensibility and imagery with Foullon’s treatment of similar themes. Through movement, costumes, sets, and music, this tale of pioneer settlers portrays the sobriety of the Shakers as well as the intense fervor of the revival tent, and evokes a gamut of emotions from quiet strength to passion—which resonates with the multifaceted qualities and vibrancy of Foullon’s work.

A younger generation of artists with whom Foullon’s work shows affinities include Cady Noland and Sam Durant, although Foullon’s approach is distinct from theirs. Noland transforms vernacular materials and lowbrow images of American culture into assemblages that convey an inchoate yet palpable undercurrent of violence, dejection, and loss. Her dark renditions of the American psyche, which sometimes use historical references or images and at other times are more open-ended, have numerous literary and cinematic counterparts. In contrast, Foullon’s treatment of history as a starting point for subject matter is neither forlorn nor sinister, yet like Noland she employs the strategy of the ad hoc as a compositional device to manifest tenuous, contingent relationships. Sam Durant’s sustained engagement with highly charged or contested episodes in American history springs from a consideration of their contradictions. His work offers forms and images removed from their original context that are either stripped to their essential details or recombined. In his recent piece Scaffold, presented at Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany, Durant recreated the actual dimensions of a series of gallows from historical executions into a large-scale construction that does not immediately reveal its sources. Like Durant, Foullon engages with passages of American history that manifest conflicting values or states of transition, yet her work avoids direct emphasis on violence, social injustice, or specific didactic commentary. Instead it grapples with the contested terrain of history in ways that are more open-ended and haptic.

Foullon’s ongoing engagement with aspects of social history parallels current directions in the field of American cultural studies that concern interpretations of national identity. The American landscape as reality and myth is under investigation on many fronts; questions of whether or not this landscape and its abundance of natural resources...
still embody hopefulness and the promise of the “good life” have great currency and urgency. Foullon has described her work over the past five years as being stimulated by an awareness of contemporary angst that began around 2008, and by the sobering recognition that hard work is not necessarily rewarded by prosperity; instead, as in the Great Depression, it may only bring about more hard work.4 Her tool renovation pieces in particular give form to her observations about the nature of labor and utility. In these pieces, she starts with old, outmoded tools and domestic objects ranging from buck saws to washboards, strips them down, and adapts them using new materials and functions—in effect, replacing their original values with new ones. In a published interview, she stated, “I collected pre-industrial vintage tools and stripped them down, and adapts them using new materials and functions—in effect, replacing their original values with new ones.”5

Related to this, a recent distinctive feature of Foullon’s practice lies in her repurposing of sculptures from one installation to the next, “regurgitated, re-employed, and used as raw material.”6 Her willingness to recombine elements used in earlier pieces to create alternate versions for different contexts manifests her strong interest in the permeability of the human body—and perhaps the American psyche. She asserts that the works retain their former identities but live double lives, By tracing how the tool once worked in tandem with the body, I extract a geometry that echoes the contours of that movement… I see them as sirens: seductive, but also kicking you in the face a little. Within the exhibition, they do a very specific job, and that is to close down the aperture—narrowing the experience for the viewer. Making things one-on-one. But then they push you away.”7

Foullon demonstrates a fundamentally optimistic, yet complex view of American identity characterized by ingenuity, reinvention, and malaise. The non-finite quality of the life of objects that she explores embodies these ideas with vigor and vitality, giving new significance and currency to ideas about American art in our own time.

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The title of this essay was inspired by/borrowed from Barbara Rose’s book on Claes Oldenburg (referenced below), and is one of the chapter headings she uses to write about aspects of Oldenburg’s work. Rose was, in turn, inspired by the writings of American artist Robert Henri.


2 “A Nation That’s Losing Its Toolbox,” New York Times, July 22, 2012, business section, p. 1, 5. This theme has become an increasingly common refrain voiced by public intellectuals. In That Used To Be Us (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), writers Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum argue that the loss of this sensibility on the part of Americans reflects a serious decline in the national consciousness that is playing out on the world stage as the United States becomes eclipsed by other countries with—if not more ingenuity—more discipline.

3 Correspondence with the artist, August 20, 2012.

4 Anam Mohdazad in Rachel Foullon: Ruminant Recombinant, exhibition text (Los Angeles: ltd los angeles, April 26–May 26, 2012). Mohdazad’s text is a reworking of an essay by Michael Ned Holte on the occasion of a 2010 exhibition by Foullon, also at ltd los angeles. Since Foullon’s intent in her 2012 show was to recombine and “scramble” some of the works from her earlier show, Mohdazad adopted a similar approach in her text, using only words from Holte’s earlier essay to create a new one.

5 The “Cluster” works hang on a melting apparatus designed by Foullon to offer various possibilities for arrangement. This consists of two rows of melted and stained candle melting on which hanging sliding pieces with oversized pegs; these can be manipulated to contract or expand the overall installation.

6 Conversation with the artist, August 19, 2012.

7 Certain critics, however, have discerned references to lynching and butchery: see Sharon Mizota, “Hanging There at the Ready,” Los Angeles Times, May 11, 2012.

8 Conversation with the artist, February 11, 2012.


10 Statement by the artist in Mohdazad’s Rachel Foullon: Ruminant Recombinant, op. cit.

11 Foullon, Art in America, op. cit.
Cluster II, 2011
Dyed canvas, dyed linen aprons, and garden hose on cedar peg and molding 72 x 23 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster IV, 2012
Dyed cotton rope, dyed denim pant leg, and found lighting cord on cedar peg and molding 93 x 11 x 9¾ inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster VII, 2012
Dyed canvas, found garden hose, and gloves on three cedar pegs and molding 96 x 64 x 12 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster IX, 2012
Dyed vintage coverall, socks, and found rope on cedar peg and molding 44 x 22 x 9 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster X, 2012
Dyed vintage coverall, socks, and found rope on cedar peg and molding 40 x 20 x 8 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster XVI, 2012
Found garden hose and dyed vintage bag with stuffing on cedar peg and molding 27 x 20 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cluster XIX, 2012
Dyed canvas, cotton gloves, cotton rope, and found electrical cord on cedar peg and molding 54 x 23 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cruel Radiance (Buck Saw II), 2012
Antique buck saw, polished nickel-plated brass, dyed linen, and hardware 25 x 21½ x 1½ inches
Collection of Susan Harris

Cruel Radiance (Seeds Sower), 2012
Antique seed sower, polished nickel-plated brass, dyed canvas, and hardware 35 x 28 x 7 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cruel Radiance (Washboard), 2012
Antique washboard, polished nickel-plated brass, dyed canvas, and hardware 27 x 27 x 4½ inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

For Albany (Bandana), 2012
Canvas, vintage eastern white pine, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware 22 feet x 18 feet x 16 inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

For Albany (Dicker), 2012
Canvas, vintage eastern white pine, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware 42 feet x 18 feet x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Commemorative with Modern Progress, 2010
Canvas, inland red cedar, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware 13 feet x 116 feet x 17 inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Great Plains, gold dust, 2009
Canvas, inland red cedar, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware 89 x 140 x 5½ inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

There was at this time no specific room for sleeping in, 2009
Canvas, inland red cedar, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware 89 x 70 x 6 inches (dimensions variable)
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Hallenhaus (and the severance of our own ties to the land), 2008
Western red cedar, canvas, dye, stain, sea salt, and hardware 84 x 48 x 144 inches
Courtesy of the artist and ltd los angeles, Los Angeles, California

Cemetery Ring (Oxford), 2006
Paper, chipboard, and paper-wrapped nail ¾-inch diameter ring on 3-inch nail
Collection of Christine A. Zehner

This is always there (near Jewett), 2003–06
Paper and glue 30 x 9 x 2 inches
Private collection
1978 Born in Glendale, California
1979 Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

EDUCATION
2000 B.S., New York University, New York
2004 M.F.A., Columbia University, New York

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2012 Present Future, Artissima 19, Torino, Italy
Rachel Fournier, Blained Sun, University Art Museum, University at Albany, State University of New York, (catalogue)
Rumnam Reemkamit, ltd los angeles, Los Angeles
2010 An Accounting, ltd los angeles, Los Angeles
2009 Grab a Roof and Grow, Nicole Bauchene Gallery, New York

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2013 In Practice, SculptureCenter, Long Island City, New York
Remnander Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa
2011 Raw Materials, Greene Park Gallery, Los Angeles
Double, double, Workplace Gallery, Gateshead, Great Britain
Group Show, 7 Sculptors, Brennan & Griffin, New York
GRES WOLKEN TORUOKIN VEUILLYTON, curated by Jesse Benson, Los Cienegas Projects, Los Angeles
Becoming Something Found, curated by Fabienne Laaere and Molly Smith, Jolie Laide Gallery, Philadelphia
The Light Show, Kate Werble Gallery, New York

2010 Outdoor Sculpture Garden, curated by New Art Dealers Association, Canyon Ranch, Miami Beach

Painting and Sculpture: To Benefit the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Lehman Maupin, New York
De-Nature, curated by Wendy White, Jolie Laide Gallery, Philadelphia
Curated Prints by Forth Estate, Federiske Taylor Gallery, New York
2009 Foundation Editions, Rhode Island School of Design Memorial Hall Gallery, Providence
On From Here, Guilid & Greythul, New York
2008 Without Walls, Museum 52, New York, (catalogue)
Beyond a Memorable Fancy, Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space, New York (catalogue)
what the midnight can show us, Museum 52, New York
Freah Kitt, curated by Dave Kennedy-Cutler, Dumbo Arts Center, Brooklyn
Unfurnished Rooms, curated by Jacob Robichaux, Unit B, San Antonio
2007 Workplace Program 2007-07, Dieu Donné Papermills,甗, Sé, San Antonio
NeoIngentiy, curated by Keith Mayerson, Derek Eller Gallery, New York
Sonobuba, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara
The Line of Time and the Plane of Now, curated by Jacob Dyanforth, Ohad Meromi and Halley Rodman, Wallpspace, New York

2006 Thin Walls, curated by Sara Greenberger Rafferty, Maus von Nottsagensible Gallery, Brooklyn
Bring the War Home, curated by Drew Heitzler, G.G.S., Los Angeles
2005-2006 Material World: New Sculpture for the Commons, Public Art Fund, MetroTech Center, Brooklyn (catalogue)
2005 Spectrum, curated by Kate Shepherd, Galerie Lelong, New York
Talk to the Land, arranged by Matt Keegan, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York (catalogue)
Buckofra, Wallpspace, New York
A Slower Time, Sandroni Rey, Los Angeles Papier, Nicole Klagbrun Gallery, New York
Drama, Romance, Loneliness, Narcissism and Many More Diseases of the Soul, Audialdo Fine Art, New York
2004 Walltopper for the 21st Century, Placemaker, Miami
Four-Ply, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
Gypsy’s Curse, curated by José Diaz, Buena Vista Building, Miami
Art in the Office, curated by Matt Keegan, The Global Consulting Group, New York
2003 Vivere Venezia II: Recycling the Future, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice (catalogue)
The Artist’s Voice, curated by Stephen Hilger, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Showcase: Going to Market, curated by Ali Subotnick, Studebaker Building, Columbia University, New York
The Worst of Gordon Pym Continued, Printed Matter, New York
To Market To Market, curated by Robin Kahn, The Rotunda Gallery, New York
White on White, Quality Gallery, Brooklyn
2000 Group Show, Quality Gallery, Brooklyn
Sophia Spar Sale, Printed Matter, New York
Great America: Rosenberg Gallery, New York University, New York

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES
2012 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant, New York
2011 Fellow in Craft/Sculpture, New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA), New York
2005 Workspace Program, Dieu Donné Papermills, New York
Grazedale Arts/Wordsworth Trust Residency, Lakes District, Great Britain
2004 Caroline Newhouse Award for Sculpture, Columbia University, New York
2003 Vivere Venice 2: Recycling the Future, International Residency and Workshop at IUAV, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice

2002 Processions, curated by Eva Respini, LeRoy Neiman Center and Low Memorial Library, Columbia University, New York (catalogue)
Tricky Alcide: Hello to Handmade Words, organized by David Humphrey, K.S. Art, New York
To Market To Market, curated by Robin Kahn, The Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn
White on White, Quality Gallery, Brooklyn
2000 Group Show, Quality Gallery, Brooklyn
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what the midnight can show us, Museum 52, New York
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2004 Walltopper for the 21st Century, Placemaker, Miami
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2003 Vivere Venezia II: Recycling the Future, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice (catalogue)
The Artist’s Voice, curated by Stephen Hilger, LeRoy Neiman Center, Columbia University, New York
Shangri-la, curated by Michael St. John and Jason Duval, Skip Art Museum, East Ispip, New York (catalogue)
Bibliography

Holte, Michael Nied. Text accompanying exhibition at ltd los angeles, March.
Artist contribution, Transatlantico 2, SITE Magazine, Spring.
Artist contribution, -ship, collected by Lauren Mackler, Spring.
Cofer, Holland. ““Justin Lowe” (including paragraph on North Drive Press), New York Times, August 5.
Artist’s multiple included in a publication assembled by Matt Keegan, North Drive Press #2, June.
Ammirati, Domenick. “Art in the Office.” artforum.com, April 17.
“Vivere Venezia 2: Recycling the Future.” exhibition catalogue, Monello Editori, Venice, Italy.
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Rachel Foullon: Braided Sun

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Photography: Gary Davidson Photography, with additional photographs by Jason Mandella (p. 34), Tyler Par (pp. 12, 23), Tom Towes Imaging (pp. 10, 16-29)

Robert Wedemeyer (pp. 10, 13, 16-29)

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Haim Steinbach and Paula Cooper, Ltd, Los Angeles


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