

ARTslant

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A Meandering Reading of Rachel Foullon

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An Accounting

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Rachel Foullon thinks about rural spaces: the dank packed dust of a barn tack room, horse harnesses and halters hanging from the ramshackle hooks, the dark holes of a musty hay loft. This rural poetry has haunted poets and thinkers for centuries, some idealizing those spaces and making them the symbol of lost innocence, others finding them quaint and beautiful.

Foullon has another take on the countryside and rural, namely as the platform and backbone of economies. Whereas someone like Dan Graham noticed how the site specific interventions of minimalism meant little without some thinking about bureaucracy and about how government, zoning, capitalism, and other forms of order can impact a space, Foullon might say all those concerns start even earlier — in a barn and on a farm. A sculptural space instead might be thought of through the futures market: how gold, wheat, corn, maize, cotton, and cattle impact global life.

I find this premise fascinating and current, a platform from which a multiplicity of meanings can spiral outwards. For instance, when the Obama Administration released its budget, one victim of the cuts were what they administration called “wealthy farmers.” This is another way of talking about subsidies. “We can’t afford it,” became the mantra. But the backlash, in this case, was justified. Cut cotton subsidies, for instance, and the market for cotton swings to East Africa and bottom-line farmers will cut their cotton production and thus jobs. The bottom-line consumer will go wherever it finds the cheapest cotton and therefore Africa. The cuts affect an entire chain of the economy. From another viewpoint, one could argue



that cutting subsidies to big farms is justified, shifting the market to small organic farms and taking money out of the hands of the wealthy, shifting it around a bit. To look at it a third way, if Africa is stimulated, then that might be a humanitarian mission, bringing parts of Africa out of starvation and above the global poverty line. Who are Americans to subdue Africa using money it doesn’t have? The issue is complicated.

And what does any of this have to do with Foullon's work? Well, I would argue a great deal. If we are to take the format of her presentation seriously, then we need to think about how rural life can extend all the way into an art gallery. She has made so many curious decisions that demand an aggressive reading. For example, the ceiling heights and the placements of walls and joints affect the placement of her wall hangings. There's a sense of determinism like that found in early Frank Stella and a Donald Judd-like precision in how the cedar beams and barn slats are fabricated (I should say, politely, that most barns these days are metal and wooden slats belong only to the past). The cloths that Foullon dyes are employed and left sagging like Robert Morris or Richard Serra felt hangings. There is a sense, in other words, of order here, whether eternal or zoned, it pervades the gallery.

But this order is tempered with rough-hewn memorial details that collect. Those same cloths have the menstrual connotations of Louise Bourgeois, they are stained and organic like a Eva Hesse, full of feminine labial lips and curves. I, innocently, thought of the Depression-era photos of Walker Evans and the fetish-like description of rural gear of James Agee. Ultimately however, I got to the fluid current of these proceedings: the rural to Foullon exists in an earth mother-ish manner as much as it does as an element of an economy.

The accounting, for Foullon, is both about numbers and an accounting in general, an accounting for how things are. Thus those stalks of corn in the dirt in Iowa, birthed by the earth mother and tempered and arranged by our hands, extend widely to the economy and as far as Africa, or even further, into the remote, distant, and disconnected confines of the art gallery.

I've over-read Foullon's work. I freely admit it.

When you go to the show, it will take generous leaps of imagination to make it to these thoughts. Most will see just a few lightly varnished constructivist designs with some sagging cloth, an unremarkable curved fence accented with a folded studio drop cloth with vaginal overtones. Things will look slightly minimalist, distant, and a bit weird. But, that said, my over-reading is my dream for this work, and even perhaps, Foullon's intention for it.

- Ed Schad

