Rachel Foullon

Rachel Foullon, *The Abacus*, 2010, canvas, Western red cedar, dye, stain, and hardware, 56 × 114 × 96 inches (142.2 × 289.6 × 243.8 cm), installation view.

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The Los Angeles–based artist Rachel Foullon has exhibited her work widely and was a founding member of the curatorial initiative Public Holiday Projects. Here, she talks about her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, at ltd, held during spring 2010.

This exhibition is entitled *An Accounting*, and the twofold definition (with references to economics and narrative) applies. At ltd, a sizable new gallery founded by Los Angeles collector Shirley Morales, I'll be showing my largest sculptures to date. The scale will provide an atmospheric contrast to my show last fall in New York at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, where I maximized the use of a smaller space by creating a dense, workshoplike environment that fostered an appropriate sense of intimacy. My work of the past couple of years has referenced specific types of barns and rural dwellings wherein living quarters for humans, livestock, and work animals are all combined under one roof that also houses tools and food storage: it's an original live-work scenario of potentially the most grueling and imagery-rich kind. I'm dealing with the same thematic locale in this show, but it's almost as if we step outside the barn (there's a little more fresh air out here, no?) and begin to refer to a few more of the players on this landscape of self-reliance.

The centerpiece of the show is a ceiling-mounted sculpture called *The Abacus*. Built from Western red cedar four-by-fours, the piece is milled, finished, and assembled with a sensibility akin to furniture making. The abacus's familiar horizontal bars are oriented in relation to the ceiling, so the viewer passes underneath it like a short-lived arcade. Its structure is derived from the *Hallenhaus*—Saxon farmhouses that

conjoined the house and barn functions in one and made their way to North America in the 1600s. These barns share the same architectural origins as churches. In the abacus's design, the supporting diagonal braces have been turned outward, like a ballet plié, making room for the traditional counting beads.

The beads are cut and sewn from canvas, each as a Möbius strip with a hole in its center. I came on the Möbius strip lurking within functional design in England in 2005, when I purchased a bundle of household rags from an agricultural fair. They were made from rectangular pieces of fabric that, when given a half twist and folded before being seamed together, created an endless surface with an enigmatic sense of volume, excellent for cleaning, as well as for accessing ideas of infinity. This form's usage in *The Abacus* relates to the cyclical passage of seasons, harvests, generations, and an iteration of time as a stretchable shape. It's like Mark Twain's axiom, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes," or a dog chasing its own tail.

Each bead is individually dyed using cold-process fiber-reactive dyes and a low-water immersion technique, which yields a random marbling effect. As the viewer passes beneath the abacus, the color progression of the beads is like that of pale flesh being slowly cooked, browning and then burning black, then bursting open as something red is exposed, revealed and visually intense. The rawness subsides and scars pink. This color event is an abstract idea, but it serves as a methodology to create an experience that's visually explosive and saturated in relation to ideas of something graphic and full of life, desirable albeit painful. Such is the seduction and intensity of living close to animals and the land. I'm interested in a contemporary relationship to that desire, as well as the parallel of the farm to an artist's studio. While this room-size abacus isn't interactive (it doesn't hang low enough for a viewer to "use"), the experience is one that's definitely bodily.

The Abacus is an accounting device that tells the story of how something sustains or survives. Its economy belongs to collective cultural memory. An abacus doesn't record or store historical data like a computer can, but counts and takes stock of the present moment. Much like the all-in-one space of the *Hallenhaus* barn, it looks both backward and forward and, in this way, is a reckoning of past, present, and future time.