



interview by MEGAN PLUNKET

Megan Plunkett - I wanted to ask you first about the physical nature of your work. There is something almost uncanny about the nature of the work, as the crafting often lends the objects a quality that is both familiar and foreign. Do you see a connection between the physical practice of making the objects and their meaning? Or does one process inform the other?

Rachel Foullon - Now more than ever in my process, I notice a real back-and-forth flow of "inform"-ing between the actual making of the objects and their meanings or implications -- and there kind of has to be when spending time making things by hand. In my experience it literally takes time -- too much time -- for information to only move in only one direction. And if it's not moving, it's puddling, and then that's good too, because God only knows what you'll pull out of that stinking mess later. It could be genius.

I really enjoy that time-stretching aspect of making things by hand. The lasting effect. And how much touch happens -- touching every part of the material in some way. I recognize what a romantic idealization this material sensuality is, but I really adore spending QT with great raw materials -- cedar, fabric and paper. My commitment to making things with a "from scratch" mentality is part-fetish, but is also deeply connected to some of the underlying ideas within my work...those surrounding the possibility of the homemade, self-invented life via evidence of human survival at its most basic essence. Fundamental ideas of living and working on ones own terms, living alongside animals, growing food, constructing ones own structures for various activities to take place, simultaneously looking back at a history and into a future...seasons and the calendar.

I'm looking at forms and their variations both in nature and in human object making, and realizing that I've been doing that for

years. The evolution of the shed...or the oyster shell. It's not academic research; it's visual.

Maybe that's connected to the familiar and foreign qualities you ask about...the form is the familiar but the specific variation that I have represented is where foreignness enters. A recognizable object may appear drained of color, or petrified, or unusually large or perhaps very small...there are endless ways of representing a familiar object on unfamiliar terms!

MP - Your recent work is more abstract. Do you see this as a natural continuation of your process? Is there a tension between rendering things that are representational and things that are abstract?

RF - My recent forays into abstract ways of working have honestly caught me by surprise. It was not somewhere I intended to go. But these recent Hallenhaus sculptures (a 'hallenhaus' is the earliest American, by ways of Dutch, barn architecture, which housed both humans and animals together in a shared space,) are coming out of some very contemplative thinking I've been doing about these structures and the human/animal relationships they housed. This includes residual objects of agrarian living as carriers of ideas about sweat, labor, blood, killing for food, staying warm, surviving in weather...and the forms that came out of this thinking were not representational. They were not figurative, but rather gestural and abstract. These seemed to be the only forms that could appropriately hold and preserve this amorphous thinking.

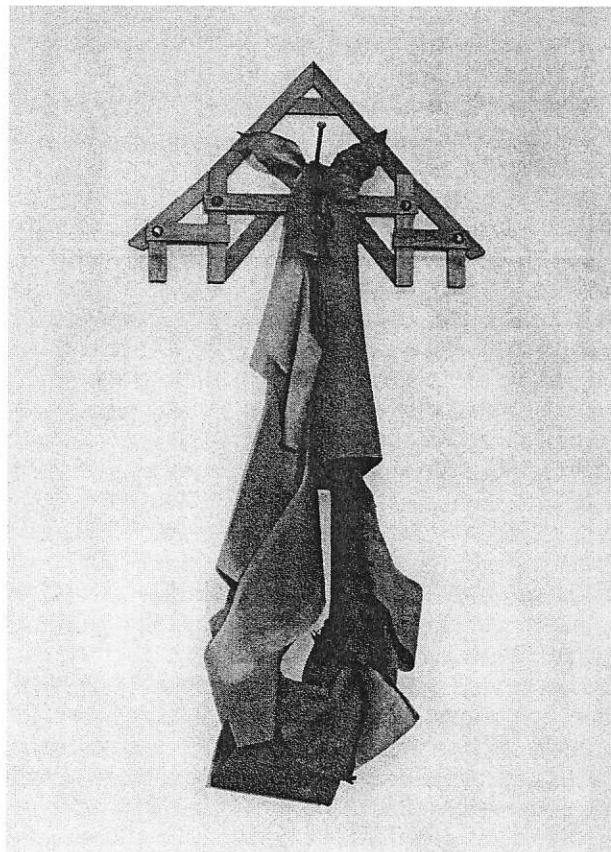
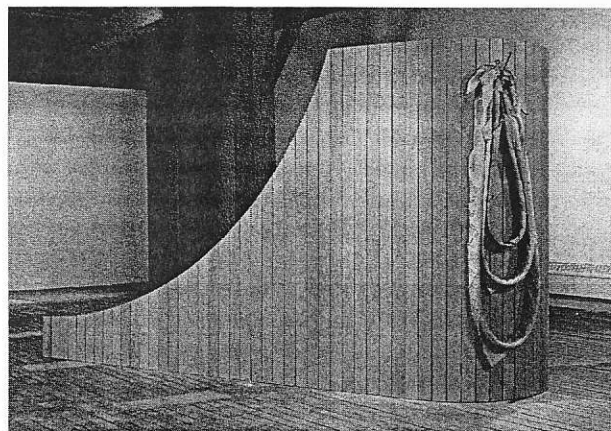
Your question about the tension between the two is good. I don't know the answer, but I want to explore this very thing in the work I am beginning for a show which will open a year from now. It's a room-sized calendar with an abstract supporting structure and will include a wide variety of objects that which I can only envision as both abstract and recognizable.



MP - In 2004 you formed Public-Holiday Projects with Matt Keegan and Laura Kleger. Can you talk about this project? What surprised you about the work that came out? Did it inform how you thought about your own work after having worked on another more experimentally collaborative project?

RF - Public-Holiday Projects was formed in 2004, at the end of our (Matt, Laura and my) experience in grad school. We went to Columbia during a moment where there was a bright light shining on the school coming from Chelsea galleries. It was a destination for our work that which we did not want to think of as ultimate. The anticipated "tightening up" of the work of our peers felt like a death knell. A typical gallery context felt like a drastic contrast to a comparison with the exploratory nature of being in grad school together, where the energy and ideas circulated freely without commercial pressures. We wanted to create an alternative that could operate simultaneously outside of New York (plus we wanted to travel, thus the idea of working vacations and how we came up with our name.) PHP allows us a forum for continually engaging with and supporting the work of other artists, providing them with opportunities to try new things in new places, and have different kinds of exhibition experiences, ideally those that we would like to have ourselves. We place a lot of emphasis on gaining a rich understanding of each artist's work... and taking the energy and excitement collected during a studio visit, where an artist's work oftentimes opens itself up to reveal so much more, and bringing this integral content into an exhibition space. Our projects are always fairly ambitious.

I think that ambition has given me some courage to do more within my work, explore it via more avenues, maximize it. But of course only in a handmade, grassroots kind of way....



Hallenhaus (and the severance of our own ties to the land), 2008
Stained Western red cedar, Dyed canvas and Hawaiian red sea salt, hardware
84 x 48 x 144 inches

Lös hoes (wave), 2008
Western red cedar, dyed canvas, Hawaiian red sea salt and galvanized steel nail
48 x 25 x 12 inches