

ARTFORUM



Rachel Foullon, *For Albany (Dickie)*, 2012, canvas, vintage Eastern white pine, dye, stain, hardware, 18' x 18' x 16'.

Rachel Foullon

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM - UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY

1400 Washington Avenue

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Thomas Hart Benton, Claire McCardell, John Ford, and Susan Howe, among many others, have reimagined America's pioneering history as a romance of self-sustenance and hard work that carries an authenticity far greater than anything modern life could possibly allow. Rachel Foullon's first solo exhibition at a museum, "Braided Sun," which spans almost a decade's worth of work, is a meditation on this cultural impulse, as she takes the emblems and materials of our hardscrabble agricultural past and transforms them into luminously beautiful, even fetishistic, sculptural objects.

Foullon's "Cruel Radiance" series, 2011–12, consists of farmyard or household implements—an antique bucksaw, washboard, and seed sower—metamorphosed into Surrealist devices via strategically added pieces of nickel-plated brass, polished into guillotine-blade seductiveness and perfection. They are among the most striking works in the show, as they further estrange the near-dead functionality of these tools into a kind of funerary, hyperaestheticized sacredness. Also marvelous is the site-specific *For Albany (Dickie)*: a Brobdingnagian formal dress collar—the kind working-class men of the late nineteenth century might've worn to a Sunday service—made from canvas, dyed in smoky, pewter-rich grays, and hung upon an inverted, broken cruciform shape made of white pine. It is a visually immersive piece that takes some of its formal cues from Robert Morris's felt sculptures and Beverly Semmes's wraithlike dress works.

Foullon bears out in this show what many of us fear, perhaps more now than ever before: that our lives of überconvenience and overleisure will deaden our sense of what constitutes real risk, real purpose, and genuine survival—namely, a life worth living.

— Alex Jovanovich