

## AROUND THE GALLERIES

## A culture broken, bereft

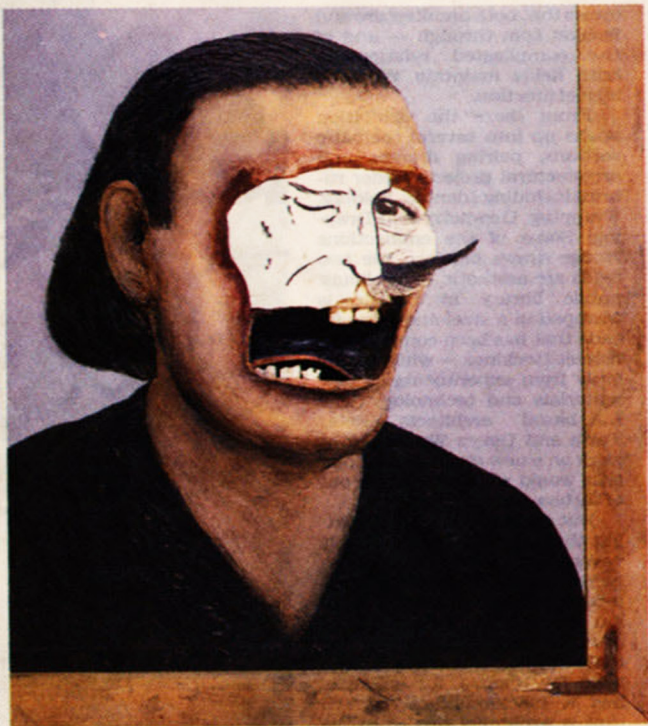
By LEAH OLLMAN  
Special to *The Times*

Llyn Foulkes just keeps scraping away. For more than 45 years, he's been roughing up whatever comfort can be mustered by home, health and material satisfaction. He aspires to keep things raw — raw emotions, raw surfaces. They're more vulnerable that way, and more real, the abraded surfaces metaphors and consequences of degraded values.

Recent paintings and assemblages at Craig Krull Gallery testify to the enduring, unsettling power of Foulkes' vision. One additional, stunning piece by the artist hangs down the row at Patricia Faure Gallery. The nearly two dozen smaller works at Craig Krull build to a pitch of anxious urgency. The images emerge from a culture damaged and bereft, crowded by the false shelters of popular entertainment, blind faith, industrialized war and rampant consumerism.

Foulkes packs his work with personal, cultural and historical references, charging it with a density and weight uncommon these days in galleries given over to the slight gesture and clever one-liner. The self-portrait, "Dali and Me," is exemplary, a tight bundle of the grotesque, epic and comic. Foulkes has adopted a conventional bust portrait format only to interrupt, distort, subvert and violate it, all to serve the portrait's chief function: revealing character and identity.

A photographic fragment of Salvador Dali's eye and trademark mustache stands in for part of Foulkes' face. A cartoon sketch fills in more. The mouth is a murky, gaping cave gouged out of the painting's surface and stuck with a few huge teeth and a wooden flap for a tongue.



Craig Krull Gallery

**SELF-PORTRAIT:** Llyn Foulkes subverts and distorts the format of a conventional bust portrait in "Dali and Me."

part existential Francis Bacon scream. The artist's combed-back hair shifts in consistency from viscous paint to crusty strands of the real thing. A simple piece compared with Foulkes' more elaborate reliefs, the portrait nevertheless throbs with intensity.

Familiar Foulkes motifs recur throughout: the rugged landscape replicated in splintered wood; the face, with features blotted out by blood-red smudges. Disaffection is the prevailing mood, grit the predominant texture. The temperament of Foulkes' work, its clawing at the unsightly underbelly of American pop culture, ought never to go out of favor. It keeps us alert. Artists emerging now tend to strategically buy in rather than conscientiously opt out, as so many of Foulkes' peers in the 1960s and '70s did in their quest

Another figure from that generation, Robert Dean Stockwell, is paired with Foulkes at Craig Krull and represented by a selection of recent prints, collages and assemblages. Most don't match the visceral potency of Foulkes' work.

The inkjet prints are dreadful and the crosses constructed of colored dice are quickly tiresome. But the collages pieced together from magazine pages can pulse with wonder and dismay.

Images in the grid segments of "Statue of Limitations" riff poignantly on violence and trauma. One shows a hand buried in rubble, another a crowd at a lynching. A Renaissance sculpture of David holding the head of Goliath bridges the two and offsets the blunter scenes with an aestheticized version of battle. The rest of the collage works like a fugue, reintroducing the themes of conflict and splendor.

Foulkes and Stockwell were included in last fall's "Semina Culture: Wallace Berman & His Circle" exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, a meaty survey of a community of artists earnest and resourceful, whose embrace of the worn and discarded was as passionate as its rejection of the seductive sheen of the postwar commercial mainstream. These shows makes a worthy postscript.

**Craig Krull Gallery**, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 828-6410, through Wednesday.

**Patricia Faure Gallery**, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 449-1479, through Nov. 25. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Games of dress-up:  
To what purpose?

Heather Cantrell's staged photographic tableaux at sixspace are the graduate art school equivalent of kids dressing up and putting on a show in the clubhouse. The production looks fun and involving from the inside; less so from where we get to see it in stills on the wall.

Self-consciousness and self-referentiality mark this work as something beyond child's play, but Cantrell doesn't take the enterprise far enough. The images are quirky, but not enough to make them fascinating. They are mildly humorous, but hardly sparkle with ingenuity.

In most of the pictures, friends of the artists pose in costume before a weathered drop-cloth. Some of the dress and props and certainly the vignetting of the images give the pictures a faux 19th century feel; but Cantrell is no Oscar Rejlander or Julia Margaret Cameron. She flaunts the artifice at work — letting the backdrop's edges show, showing how close to the ground the tightrope is stretched, mixing real guns with flat cutouts in a mock duel — but friction between the real and represented never fully develops.

The most intriguing photographs are the simplest. A portrait of a man with tousled hair, unshaven face and gleaming, silvery eyeglass lenses suggests more of the mystery of paranor-

mal power and vision than several other images that make direct reference to spiritual mediums. Another image, of a black-haired, black-eyed woman in elegant satin dress, stroking an animal pelt, trades Cantrell's usual ake sobriety for a more persuasive evocation of time and reason suspended.

**sixspace**, 5803 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (323) 932-6200, through Wednesday. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.sixspace.com](http://www.sixspace.com)

Haunting beauty  
from the air

Slep provides it. Death grants it. Oblivion can be a sweet state of abandon or the consequence of a dark act of negligence. "Oblivion," the collective title of David Maisel's new aerial photographs of Los Angeles suggests both of these conditions and more.

One of the large black and white prints at Paul Kepeikin Gallery suggests a necropolis in shallow relief, the grid spanning from edge to edge. Another, more brooding image, presents a view across L.A. toward the east, where glinting mountains separate the minute circuitry of city streets from the vast, dark, unarticulated beyond.

Though the L.A. photographs don't manifest as much tension as Maisel's earlier work rendering environmental trauma with the chromatic splendor and minimalist clarity of stained glass, they do generate their own quiet sense of displacement. Maisel has printed several with values reversed, like negatives, and the effect is subtly spectral. Trees alongside the freeway read as puffs of cotton or bleached clumps of dust clinging to the hard line of the interchange.

The ubiquity and availability of satellite imagery lessens the surprise of Maisel's pictures, but not their haunting beauty. Printed grainy, in high contrast, these odes to the forgotten patterns of our realm look as if they were composed of chalk and ash.

**Paul Kepeikin Gallery**, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 937-0765, through Nov. 25. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.paulkepeikinalgallery.com](http://www.paulkepeikinalgallery.com)

Sacred texts and  
the power of love

In "Looking for Love," one of the beautifully simple, eloquent works in Linda Ekstrom's show at Sherry Frumkin Gallery, the text on 10 pages of a book has been gently abraded. All the letters have been rubbed away except for those in the word love.

Occasionally the entire word appears, but mostly the pages are a raw blur, awash in single, stray letters. The letters become surrogates, enacting the human ordeals of solitude and attachment.

The pages also cast a symbolic slant on another phenomenon: What you look for, your determination will enable you to find, however buried or masked by competing claims on your attention.

Ekstrom uses books, Bibles mainly, as the primary material of her art. She releases tremendous metaphoric power through manipulation of their physical form. Cutting and wrapping, shredding and tying take on ritualistic significance; they serve as Ekstrom's means of engaging with sacred text.

In the variety of sculptural works here, printed pages of the Bible are sources of effusion (stripped and rippling like tresses out of their binding), light-hearted enthusiasm (shredded and joined like a cheerleader's pom-pom), stability (finely cut and mounded into a planetary orb) and possible constriction (tightly twisted into a long, looping rope).

Whether Ekstrom, a professor at UC Santa Barbara, starts with the Bible or Emily Dickinson's poetry (as she does here in several pieces), her work leads to questions of sanctity and faith. What power have we invested in the word? Is that potency palpable, ethereal or both? Can the printed word bear the weight of being both vessel and content? Ekstrom's provocative work answers a mighty yes.

**Sherry Frumkin Gallery**, 3026 Airport Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 397-7493, through Dec. 16. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays. [www.frumkingallery.com](http://www.frumkingallery.com)