

For immediate release

FOLK DEVIL

July 11 – August 7, 2013

Opening reception: Thursday, July 11, 6–8 PM



Lynn Chadwick, *The Watchers*, 1960 (detail)
Photograph: John Donat/RIBA Library Photographs Collection

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Folk Devil*, a group exhibition curated by Rodolphe von Hofmannsthal in the gallery's 525 and 533 West 19th Street spaces in New York. It borrows its title from sociologist Stanley Cohen's 1972 study *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, which looked at modern society's deep-rooted fear of subcultures and the morally aberrant. More specifically, "folk devil" was Cohen's description of the British media's hostile reaction towards youth groups who clashed on the beaches of British seaside towns on summer bank holidays in the early 1960s.

Bringing together a diverse group of artists, *Folk Devil* presents a comment on the tendency to create artificial connections between individuals with different backgrounds and no inherent commonality. It also contains a self-referential statement on the idea of "free rides," a term used in Cohen's

essay to denote preventative actions by the police, who would pick up random groups of youths in the seaside towns and drive them to locations too far for them to return.

The use of disparate fragments and found objects characterizes several of the works on view. **Spartacus Chetwynd's** life-size painted fabric and latex puppets line up against the wall like belligerent guards—fearsome but also lonely and vulnerable—while **Mike Nelson's** helmet atop a thin wooden stick resembles a primitive doll, with bones at the feet inspiring caution as well as empathy. The exaggerated proportions of **Brian Griffiths's** bear head, sown from canvas and installed like a tent with ropes and poles, project isolation and dislocation rather than power and strength. Viewed together, these works resemble an army of abject creatures, handmade rejects whose original purpose remains elusive.

Other sculptural works in the show reinforce a sense of uncertainty. **Lynn Chadwick's** works, characterized by acute angles and spiky twisted forms, can be seen to reflect the anxieties and fears of post-war Britain. In the words of art historian Herbert Read, they present "images of flight, or ragged claws 'scuttling across the floors of

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silent seas,' of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, [and] the geometry of fear." The do-it-yourself aesthetics of **Jason Rhoades's** assemblage of motorized scooter, steer horns, and buckets, buoyantly titled *The Future is Filled with Opportunities*, poorly masks an obsessiveness with clutter and an irrational logic that feels ironic and impotent. Likewise, **Franz West's** papier-mâché form on a chain metal stand resembles a cut-off body part, bright and colorful, but disintegrated and decomposing.

Paintings on view also convey loneliness. **Marlene Dumas's** *The White Disease* presents a pale and despondent individual branded by an ambiguous disorder, while **Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's** portrayals of solitary young girls facing away from the viewer suggest seclusion and mystery. Eschewing figuration, and including dirt on par with oil, **Oscar Murillo's** canvases imply action, performance, and chaos, but are in fact methodically composed and tied to a notion of community stemming from the artist's cross-cultural ties to London and Colombia. **Eddie Peake's** bold, spray-painted slogans evolve through his performances that often incorporate dance and music, and use British slang to investigate notions of culture and sexuality. **Sophie von Hellermann's** *Fighting on the Beach* provides perhaps the closest allusion to Cohen's treatise: based in Margate in the south of England, the seaside location of a violent clash between mods and rockers, von Hellermann presents an effervescent tableau of faces and bodies, at once secular and timeless.

The exhibition is curated by Associate Director Rodolphe von Hofmannsthal.

Artists included in the show: Lynn Chadwick, Spartacus Chetwynd, Marlene Dumas, Nikolas Gambaroff, Brian Griffiths, Roger Hiorns, Ryan McGinley, Oscar Murillo, Mike Nelson, Eddie Peake, Jason Rhoades, Steven Shearer, Oscar Tuazon, Sophie von Hellermann, Franz West, and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Thanks to The Brant Foundation, The Estate of Lynn Chadwick, and The Mario Testino Collection.

For all press inquiries, please contact

Kim Donica at David Zwirner 212-727-2070 kim@davidzwirner.com