



GOLUB

fighting men

VOLKOS

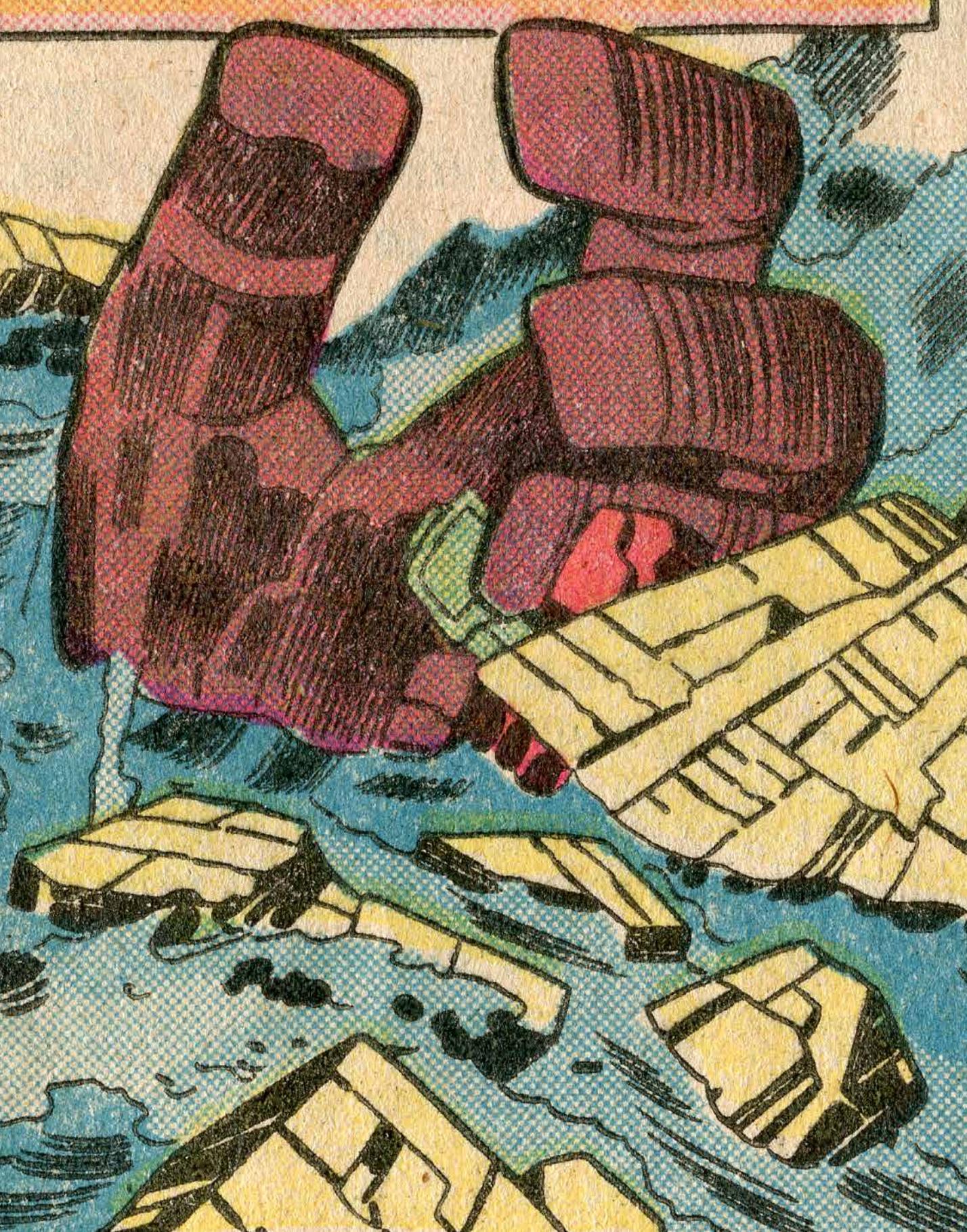
KIRBY



GOLUB

VOULKOS

KIRBY



fighting men

DANIEL DUFORD

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RONNA AND ERIC HOFFMAN GALLERY OF CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY

LEWIS & CLARK COLLEGE

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Lewis & Clark
College



FIGHTING MEN: GOLUB, VOULKOS, KIRBY

Daniel Duford

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On the cover

Jack Kirby, altered panel from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. © Marvel.

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Leon Golub, *Interrogation I*, Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/

Courtesy of The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica.

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Jack Kirby, *The Eternals* #10, page 7 (panel detail), 1977, Inker: Mike Royer. © and TM Marvel and Subs.

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Leon Golub, *Head XI*, 1963, acrylic on linen, 22.5 x 22.25 inches.
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/
Courtesy of Judy Spero and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

prequel

IN THE PANTHEON OF ART EXHIBITIONS, there are some — perhaps only a few — that significantly change the way in which one views and experiences art. I'm thinking here, historically, about the 1863 *Salon des Refusés*, which revolutionized taste in 19th-century France. Then, later, Edward Steichen's 1955 photography exhibition, *The Family of Man*, at the Museum of Modern Art — how those 508 photographs selected from almost two million pictures became a primer in how to read the human experience from a snapshot. Another landmark example might be Thomas Hoving's *The Treasures of Tutankhamun*, which toured seven American cities from 1976 to 1979. "King Tut" ushered in the era of the "blockbuster," making accessible the art exhibition as pop culture and establishing a new standard for international art exchange (the nascence of the exhibition actually stemmed from Richard Nixon's meeting with Egyptian president Anwar El Sadat in 1974). More recently, contemporary artist Fred Wilson has challenged traditional and Euro-centric museology starting with his seminal 1992 work, *Mining the Museum*, in which he collaborated with the Maryland Historical Society, reshuffling its permanent collection to reinterpret objects through a Native American and African American lens. Wilson's reimagining of how objects narrate history inspired other artists — Mark Dion, Kara Walker — to similarly challenge viewers.

Fighting Men: Golub, Voulkos, Kirby is also a game-changer.

The germ of this interesting assemblage came in a conversation I had with guest curator Daniel Duford several years ago. In describing "the show I would really like to see myself," Duford relayed how three major artists — Leon Golub, Peter Voulkos, and Jack Kirby — are tremendously influential in Duford's own studio practice. Yet even though each artist is a giant — a "superhero" — within his own genre, it would be highly unlikely to experience any of these artists' work in the presence of artwork by the others. Why is this so? Increasingly, cross-disciplinary exhibitions are being curated and mounted, but in the case of these artists, the borderlands between fine art (Golub's paintings), craft (Voulkos' ceramics), and illustration (Kirby's comic-book drawings) seem just too vast.

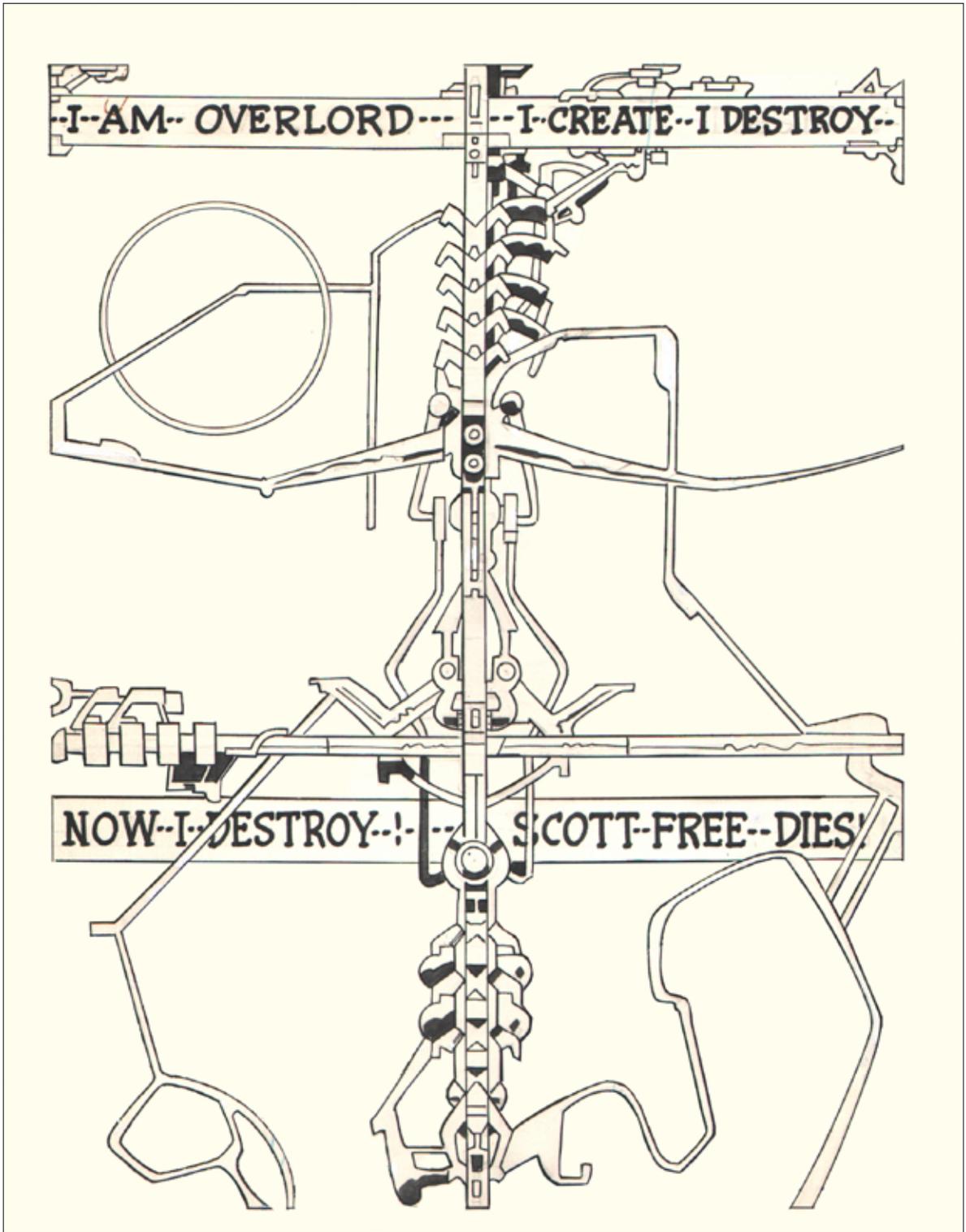
This, I think, is the genius of *Fighting Men*. United in a raw aesthetic, an obsession with brute force, and a mistrust of authoritarian power, Golub, Voulkos, and Kirby have far more in common than their divergent media suggest. Duford is quick to point out that each of these men come from humble backgrounds, were all World War II vets, and endured some level of discredit during their careers. But moreover, each artist, whether through representation or abstraction, has created signifiers of male violence — perhaps justified, as in the case of Kirby’s Captain America, or unjust, as in Golub’s *We Will Disappear You* series. These are universal and timeless themes woven through the history of art, but in *Fighting Men* these concepts are wrought in paint, clay, and newsprint.

This is how an exhibition — and the superb essays written by Duford and Stuart Horodner — can teach us to view artwork in a new way, and to reconsider historic work within our own time. Duford contextualizes the work of Golub, Voulkos, and Kirby, not isolated within the context of each artist’s own medium or against the work of each artist’s peers, but in the much wider scope of visual culture. *Fighting Men* connects the dots between three disparate artists and gives the viewer the opportunity to reach new conclusions. As such, I cannot think of a higher or better use for the Hoffman Gallery than to present such an original and compelling exhibition.

Linda Tesner

Director

Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art



Jack Kirby, Overlay for splash from *Mr. Miracle* # 2, 1970, Inker: Vince Colleta, pen and brush and ink on Bristol board, 15 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein, "Mr. Miracle" # 2. TM & © DC Comics. Used with Permission.



Leon Golub, *Gotcha!*, 2001, acrylic on linen, 24.75 x 21.5 inches.
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts,
and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

body breaking bad

STUART HORODNER

I AM OUT OF ALIGNMENT AND COMPENSATING. It should not hurt this much. I'm annoyed. Maybe the pain will just go away. Is it my bed? I go to the chiropractor, and after reviewing an X-ray, he tells me I have severe arthritis in my lower back.

I've gone for a brisk morning walk for 23 of the last 27 days. The hand-drawn calendar on the refrigerator, held up by magnets, is marked. The exercise feels good, my head is clear. I remember the riddle that the Sphinx posed to travelers outside of Thebes: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three at night?" The answer: man

Leon Golub depicted sphinxes, philosophers, warriors, boxers, mercenaries, interrogators, and patriot protesters. They were totemic, burnt, thwarted, fallen, and damaged; molded in paint that was applied, eroded with solvents, rubbed raw with cleavers, and picked at with razor blades. The pigment was pulverized, becoming part of the weave of linen or canvas.

In 1996, Leon told me: "One of the reasons that I like to emphasize the awkwardness in my work is because I see myself in it, and I see myself in a sense, surpassing it." ¹

When did I become aware of Peter Voukos? It was a book in the Cooper Union library. Not the best way to get to know about ceramics, but the bumps, gouges, slashes, and breaks were palpable. A busted functionality. Coil, slab, and accretion methods of construction. Ab-ex gestures. Connections to Lucio Fontana and Antoni Tàpies.

The heating of the kiln. Transformation. To be fired.

I didn't read too many superhero comics as a kid. I was a *Mad* magazine fan, reveling in caricatures and parodies by Sergio Aragonés, Mort Drucker, and Don Martin. The illustrations of Frank Frazetta and album covers of Roger Dean came later.

I watched George Reeves as Clark Kent/the Man of Steel in *Adventures of Superman* on television. I can recall reading that Reeves was found in his home on June 16, 1959, at the age of 45. Dead from a gunshot wound to the head, which was ruled a suicide. Many believe that he was murdered.

I watched Christopher Reeve play Superman in four feature films. In 1995, he became a quadriplegic after being thrown from a horse during an equestrian competition.

Dignity, courage. Waking up every day. Trying.

The villains were the best part of the *Batman* TV show of the '60s: Julie Newmar and Eartha Kitt as Catwoman, Cesar Romero as the Joker, Burgess Meredith as the Penguin, Frank Gorshin as the Riddler, Otto Preminger as Mr. Freeze, and Vincent Price as Egghead. I was more interested in the over-the-top acting than the episode's plot.

Bam, biff, boff, crash, kapow, ooooff, pow, sock, splat, wham, whack, whap, zap, and zowie. These were the words that appeared onscreen when someone got punched. I imagine Voulkos manhandling clay to these same sounds.

I read about Comic-Con in *The New York Times*:

"Topics for panels at this year's conference at the San Diego Convention Center include comics and the plight of indigenous peoples, feminist writers and censorship, progressive politics in comics, and of course the many financial and copyright issues created by the explosion of Hollywood's interest." ²

Is Superman Jewish? An author, Larry Tye, argues that his Kryptonian name, Kal-El, is Hebrew for "vessel of God." ³

I imagine Captain America as drawn by Jack Kirby, standing near one of Golub's awkward men wearing a "Try burning this one . . . asshole" T-shirt.

Wayne Koestenbaum in "Eavesdropping On Elimination":

Recently I wrote a commissioned essay about politics for a magazine. The editor told me, "Everyone here agrees that your piece won't fit in our issue." ⁴

In an interview conducted for *Dazed & Confused* magazine, Leon told me: “The art world is so irritating that it’s energizing. You get fucked over so much that, in a sense, you have to come back and go at it, go at them.”⁵

I think of his late canvases with the phrase “We can disappear you” stenciled on them. Scratchy images of political dissidents being beaten. Memories of being snubbed or insufficiently recognized. Officialdom reinforced.

Graffiti slogans in his paintings:

Try Me!

Why Me?

Button Your Lip

Bite Your Tongue!

Save Your Ass!

This could be you!

Fuck! I Didn’t Expect This!

Daniel Duford’s *Fighting Men* exhibition at Lewis & Clark is an extension of his *Golems Waiting* project and his epic graphic novel *The Naked Boy*. He gets to mix it up with his mentors; I wonder if Daniel imagines himself and Golub, Kirby, and Voulkos as a new Fantastic Four?

One might ask, where are the women? While Googling the Guerrilla Girls, I clicked on *The Golden Girls*, the 90s sitcom with Betty White.

Q. Why are you Guerrillas?

Georgia O’Keeffe: We wanted to play with the fear of guerrilla warfare, to make people afraid of who we might be and where we would strike next. Besides, “guerrilla” sounds so good with “girl.”⁶

I asked my Facebook friends to suggest artists whose works could be in *Fighting Men* to extend/critique/problematize the art on view — in particular, women and artists of color. Suggestions included Sue Coe, Melvin Edwards, Nicole Eisenman, Viola Frey, Nancy Grossman, Mike Kelly, Martin Kersels, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Amy Sillman, Art Spiegelman, Peter Saul, and Betty and Francesca Woodman.

Mira Schor posted: In relation to Leon Golub, one usually puts up Nancy Spero, since they seem to have divided the same world into two parts, like Zeus and Hera.

I think of Luca Buvoli's *Not-a-Superhero* character: "I am finite — fragile — fragmented — my power is my weakness." ⁷

Patsy Cline singing, "You walk by and I fall to pieces."

My favorite scenes of men talking to other men in films:

The "You can't handle the truth!" scene in *A Few Good Men*.

The "Sicilians" scene in *True Romance*.

The "always be closing" scene in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

The coin-toss scene in *No Country for Old Men*.

Courtroom scenes in *Judgement at Nuremberg*, *Inherit the Wind*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Verdict*.

Corporeality as crisis. To blow your stack. To stack the deck.

Leonard Cohen lyric from his song "Anthem":

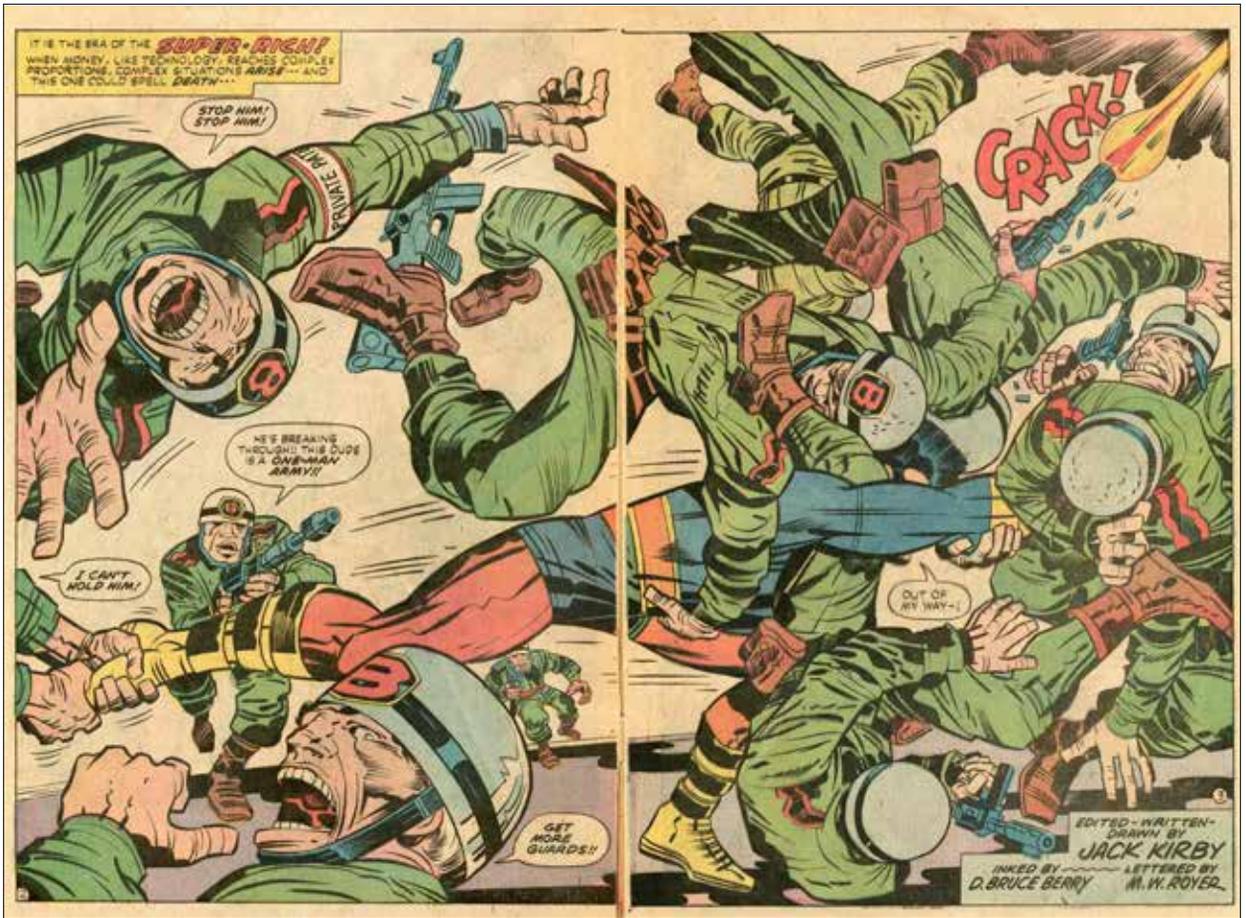
There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.

I see my shadow on the pavement as I walk.

notes

- 1 | Conversation with the artist, June 13, 1996.
- 2 | Michael Cieply, "Even at a Comics Event, You Can't Defy Gravititas," *The New York Times*, Saturday, July 13, 2012.
- 3 | *Ibid.*
- 4 | Wayne Koestenbaum, "Eavesdropping On Elimination," *Humiliation*, (New York: Picador, 2011), p. 170.
- 5 | Horodner, Stuart, "You See You Know — Leon Golub and Nancy Spero," *Dazed & Confused*, 23 (August 1996) p. 118.
- 6 | An interview with the Guerrilla Girls, guerrillagirls.com/interview/index.shtml, accessed on October, 4, 2012.
- 7 | Recent Acquisitions, Arizona State University, asuartmuseum.asu.edu/collections/recent.php, accessed on October 4, 2012.

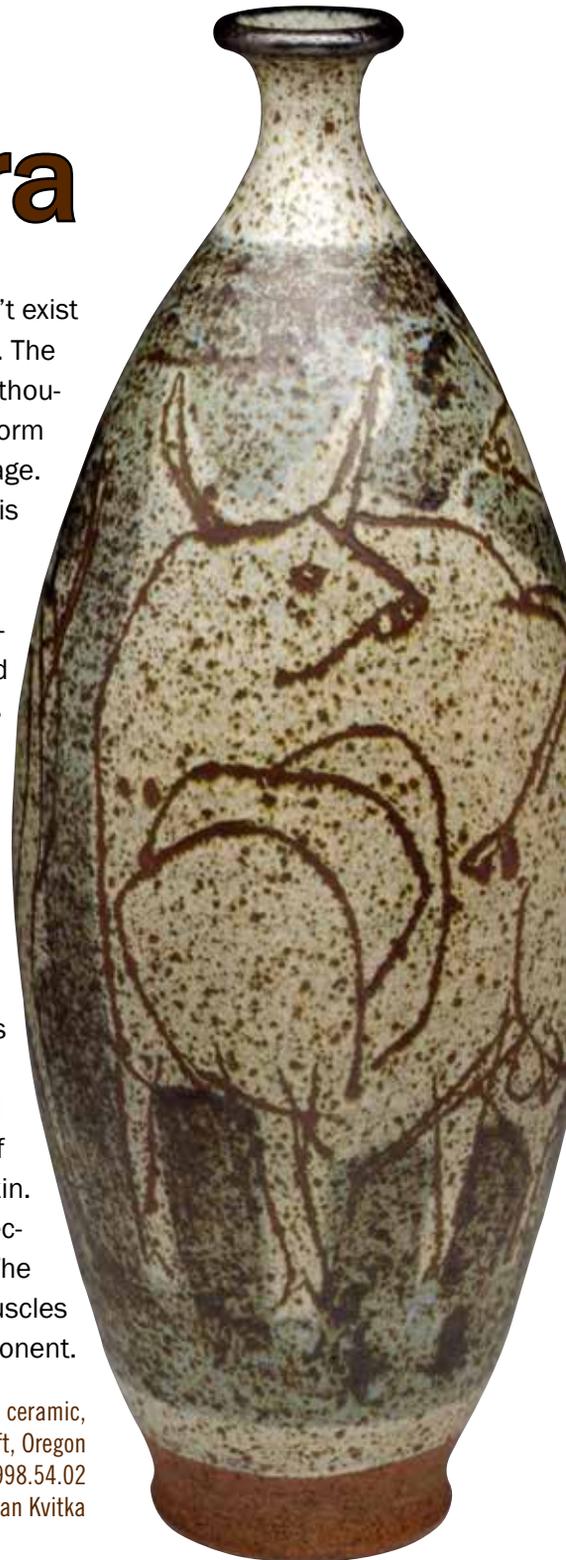


Jack Kirby, Two-page splash from *OMAC: One Man Army Corps* # 2, 1974, Inker: Mike Royer, newsprint. From "OMAC" # 2 TM & © DC Comics. Used with Permission.

the amphora

IMAGINE A GREEK AMPHORA. This amphora doesn't exist in history; it is a vessel of memory and assumption. The amphora in question is made up of fragments of a thousand years of Greek painted pottery. Because the form of the pot is fluid, it shifts and shimmers like a mirage. Sometimes it is late black Attic ware, sometimes it is Corinthian, sometimes it hails from a much earlier, more primal period. This amphora has a ground of cream-colored slip decorated with black graphic figures. There are cracks in this vessel, as it is old and has been used and roughly handled for many years before coming to rest in my imaginary museum. The scene depicts Heracles, that dunderheaded strongman beset with twelve great tasks. This particular amphora chronicles the story of the killing of the Nemean lion. On one side of the vase, an image captures the moment when Heracles — all raw muscle and loincloth — grabs the great lion by its head and, with a bare-handed wrench, cracks the beast's neck. The urn depicts only one small fragment of a larger story that exists within the oral culture of the Greek islands. In later installments of the story, we will see Heracles wearing the lion's skin. Once the strongman dons the lion skin, he has effectively absorbed the primitive ferocity of the beast. The lion skin contains both the raw power of godlike muscles and the savagery of his worthy but vanquished opponent.

Peter Voulkos, *Babe the Blue Ox (a.k.a. Tall Bottle)*, 1954, ceramic, 30 x 7 inches diameter, Collection of Museum of Contemporary Craft, Oregon Ceramic Studio Purchase, Archie Bray Foundation, 1954, 1998.54.02
photo: Dan Kvitka



The story of Heracles is a template for the Western heroic tradition. Heracles' deeds were depicted in many exalted and rarefied materials such as bronze and marble, as well as on architectural friezes. However, the largest number of Heracles pictures are painted onto what we would now consider to be the low, humble form of pottery. Consuming drink from an amphora depicting Heracles' feats was a way of ingesting a similar strength and bravado. This ruptured vessel is a crucible containing the sinew that binds together all three artists in *Fighting Men*. The amphora — a thing of beauty and balance and domesticity — holds in its scorched earthen skin stories of raw violence. These yarns of hand-to-hand combat embody a whole tradition of visual heroic narrative. The work of the three artists in this exhibition have emerged from this jar like three avenging spirits.

Jack Kirby (1917-1994), Leon Golub (1922-2004), and Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) occupy alternate dimensions. Their achievements are chronicled in different art histories, each with its own priorities. So, what are they doing in this room together, standing around with their fists balled up and glowering at each other? One simple reason is I like them all. The seed of this exhibition and essay is my own artistic practice. I claim these three palookas as my artistic godfathers. My own proclivities aside, the three turn out to make interesting bedfellows. But this is a problematic bunch — they embody not a bullying masculinity but something full of rage and pathos and sometimes humor. They are exemplars of a working artist's life. They were all immersed in discredited mediums and subject matter. They don't fit neatly. At times their work looks conservative and backward, while at other times those same qualities seem urgent and prophetic. They rooted around in the mud of history and myth, emerging with their own muscular and ham-fisted approach to their respective materials. It sounds like the setup for a joke: "A cartoonist, a painter and a potter walk into a room. . ." The punch line of the joke is just that — the work of these three disparate artists packs a wallop. Violence binds them together.

Jack Kirby, Leon Golub, and Peter Voulkos were born within seven years of each other. Kirby was the son of Austrian Jewish immigrants and grew up on the tough, impoverished streets of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Golub, also Jewish, grew up in Chicago, and Voulkos, the son of Greek immigrants, grew up in Bozeman, Montana. These men knew something of political and economic powerlessness from their earliest years. Kirby entered the burgeoning comic-book world of Depression-era Manhattan when just out of high school. He was

already an accomplished cartoonist before he was shipped off to battle. Golub served in the European theater as a cartographer after already completing a degree in art history. Before the war, Voulkos had worked in Portland, Oregon, casting gray iron fittings for Liberty Ships. He was a nose gunner in Saipan in the Army Air Corps. The GI Bill offered Golub and Voulkos a fresh start after their service. Golub got his master's at the Art Institute of Chicago when Chicago was breeding its own contentious, rowdy art scene. After returning home from the Pacific, Voulkos went to the University of Montana, intending to be a painter but instead discovered ceramics. Kirby, ever fearful of being unemployed, went right back to work.

The specter of violence and the consequences of power animate this exhibition. Raw power emanates from the artwork. To watch Voulkos manipulate a huge mound of clay on the wheel and rip and tear at the resulting form is a spectacle of brute force. The sheer strength required of Voulkos to make his work bespeaks extraordinary physical prowess. Power animated Jack Kirby's superhero comics. His best known and most personal work depicted beings literally crackling with sublime cosmic energy. Golub's large-scale canvases display a materialchutzpah similar to Voulkos' vessels, but Golub was also preoccupied with power in another sense of the word. For Golub, power and force were the abiding concerns of his paintings — the misuse of political power and the complicity of the citizen and artist in the power of the state. Of course, Kirby's stories may seem to glorify physical and metaphysical force as a means of keeping order, but his most personal work always contains ambivalence about power.

The amphora I mentioned above exists only in my mind. I have constructed it from half-remembered museum visits, books, and daydreams. It contains these three unallied powerhouses who huff and bump and push against the boundaries of their respective mediums' histories. I should confess here to my very personal reason for choosing each of these artists: My first artistic act (that I can remember) was making a comic. Even before I could string together words, I was making stories with pictures. I grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Comic books were my entry into the world of art, and Jack Kirby defined my aesthetic. I could reasonably say that Kirby is the architect of my subconscious.

It was only later, in art school, that I discovered Peter Voulkos. I took a ceramics class simply as an elective. My professor, seeing how I took so easily to clay,

described me as a caveman who had wandered into the twentieth century. As a big, luggish galoot, full of rage and awkward as hell, I found Voulkos' approach to clay a revelation. In 1998 I had the chance to spend a week with him. By that time he had hip surgery and throat cancer, but continued to smoke, drink three martinis at lunch, and throw fifty pounds of clay at a time. I felt as if I had stepped into a continuum of ceramic history. It wasn't until I was in my early thirties that I discovered Leon Golub. My drawings and sculptures explored the same territory Golub had been mapping for years. Again, like Voulkos, Golub proved to be an important teacher and guide, albeit long distance. In some ways, Golub's work and thinking about the role of art has influenced me more than any other artist. In all three artists I see a bit of myself. How does an artist channel the rage and inner violence present in the male psyche? What is a good model for someone from the working class looking to enter into the rarefied world of art?

Upon closer inspection, my Greek amphora frays. It won't stay still long enough for me to get a fix on it. The joints between the cracks of the vase open into huge fissures. The meaning of this vessel was one thing back in ancient Greece and another thing now. As its context shifts from its nativity to a more fluid situation, so does my view of it. An art form's native context is the economic and technological culture into which it was born. In *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde refers to the trickster's ability to slide between worlds as "working the joints."¹

The artists in this exhibition do work the joints. Their artworks scratch and grab at the breaks in between disciplines. *Fighting Men* is an apt title because, yes, the works do depict fighting, and each artist brawls with his recalcitrant medium. More interesting to me, however, is that they shove against the cubicles of discourse set up by contemporary art institutions. The once radical practice of conceptual art has become part and parcel with the art market. Golub continued to make paintings of human figures, openly quoting classical motifs at a moment in history when abstraction was king; painting itself is constantly being declared dead in favor of more forward-looking, technological practices. Voulkos pushed the provincial craft of pottery into the future by both denying its roots and embracing its long history. Jack Kirby was a futurist all the way, working in a junky medium but always pushing its boundaries. I want to give these artists their due, and to begin, I need to consider each in their native context before I start working the joints and blurring the boundaries.

KIRBY

one-man army

HOW DOES ONE LOOK AT JACK KIRBY'S WORK? Do you look at single images like tiny paintings? Is his work best read in collected volumes or in their original pamphlets? Certainly in an art world that has fully embraced video and performance, the quasi-narrative work of Raymond Pettibon or the sprawling mytho-poiesis of Trenton Doyle Hancock (an artist clearly influenced by Kirby's ideas) straight visual narrative can be understood as contemporary art. Among museum- and gallery-goers, there is an anxiety about looking at comics as a fine art — particularly the work of someone like Kirby. His first hurdle is that he was deadly earnest. There is no trace of irony. Second of all, for all intents and purposes he was creating adolescent literature. If anything, he would be embraced for his authenticity in the way Henry Darger was embraced posthumously for his raw, idiosyncratic epic.

“I liked figures that moved, figures that fought and twisted. Violence is just well-timed dance, a ballet choreographed, violent battles,” Kirby has said. He designed the costumes of his characters to reflect action — the signature Kirby style combines frenetic movement with massive sculptural form. In the two-page spread from *Black Panther #8*, the Black Panther's monumental leaping body fills the entire two pages. Dressed in a blue-black leotard and mask, the Black Panther descends on a hooded foe. Using the diagonally oriented head of a figure in the bottom left-hand corner, Kirby leads the reader's eye directly into the melee. Kirby's anatomy is purely hieroglyphic. Despite the graphic flatness, it somehow conveys geologic weight and texture. Fingertips are squared off. Zigzags indicate muscles. Bodies lie in impossible positions. Tiny figures in the back draw the viewer into a deeper space. Nothing is at rest. His signature glyphs of radiating energy have a name: Kirby Krackle. Kirby makes these preposterous scenes believable.

A Kirby panel could be claustrophobic while suggesting infinite space. Bodies are always in flight or combat. Even while prone, Kirby's pages vibrate, about

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

in "THE MONSTER AND THE MACHINE!"

Stan Lee + J. KIRBY

IN A SILENT, SECRET LABORATORY, A TENSE TEEN-AGER ADJUSTS A COMPLEX RAY-MACHINE OVER THE HEAD OF THE MOST INCREDIBLE LIVING CREATURE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH! AND, AS HE DOES SO, RICK JONES MUTTERS TO HIMSELF...

I'VE NEVER OPERATED THIS MACHINE BEFORE! ONE MISTAKE, AND IT CAN MEAN DEATH FOR THE HULK--AND MAYBE FOR ME, TOO! BUT I'VE GOT TO TRY IT! NO MATTER WHAT--I'VE GOT TO DO IT!



IF THIS WORKS, THE HULK MAY CHANGE BACK TO DOCTOR BRUCE BANNER AGAIN! AND IF IT DOESN'T WORK...



...THEN IT WILL BE THE END... FOR US ALL! THE RAYS HAVE REACHED CRITICAL MASS! I'VE GOT TO PULL THE LEVER...NOW!



BUT HOW DID IT ALL START?? LET US GO BACK-- BACK INTO TIME ...

Dick Ayers

Jack Kirby, *Hulk* #4 splash, 1962, Inker: Dick Ayers, pen and ink on Bristol board, 11 x 17 inches
Courtesy of Christopher Killackey. © and TM Marvel and Subs.

to burst with potential energy. In the splash page for *Incredible Hulk #4*, the Hulk is strapped, prostrate, to a gurney on a complicated gizmo. Rick Jones, his trustworthy sidekick, thinks in the expository manner of sixties comics: “I’ve never operated this machine before! One mistake and it can mean death for The Hulk — and maybe me too!” The tension of the scene lies in the dormant power of the Hulk (power bequeathed by the splitting of atoms) in conflict with the inferred and unknown power of the machine’s gamma radiation. Rick Jones is the fulcrum between the two. He’s a vulnerable youth with no superpowers or protection, and yet he controls the lever. He must rely on a Faustian bargain with the technological gods.

For all the graphic drama and compositional sophistication, Charles Hatfield is right to remind us that Kirby’s is a narrative art.³ Comics are a storytelling medium. Superhero comics are created in assembly-line style — a penciler draws the story, a writer writes the script, an inker inks the pencils, and a colorist and letterer finish the whole shebang. Because of this, it is very difficult to speak of “original” Kirby. Kirby’s most iconic works at Marvel in the sixties may have mostly Kirby in them, but there are still the (sometimes questionable) contributions of writer Stan Lee and pencils inked by various inkers. An inker can change the tenor and cadence of a drawing. See the difference between Mike Royer, who worked with Kirby in the seventies, and Vince Colletta, who did much of Kirby’s Marvel work in the sixties. Royer gives Kirby his signature sculptural blockiness and deep blacks while Colletta softens Kirby by using a thinner, more scratchy line. Even in the seventies at DC Comics, when Kirby was given full authority to write, draw, and edit his own books, the end product was mediated by the factory-style collaborative printing process.

Comics are a medium of compression. Kirby understood the medium’s mechanisms in his bones. Comics were birthed in urban industrialization; what we call “comics,” “comic books,” and “comic strips” began with modern printing technology. The first comic strips appeared in cheaply printed daily newspapers. Syndicated comics like *The Katzenjammer Kids* were part of the commercial daily life of cities all across America — it is a medium born of market democracy. The comic aesthetic comes from the limits imposed by black-and-white artwork on pulpy newsprint. Color is achieved by crude, four-color separations printed under the black line work. This kind of printing is a perfect fit for exaggerated and simple drawings; the term “cartoony” refers to a flattened and iconic form of image that is the result of technological limitations. Com-

1941! The world at war! And in a full-security laboratory, frail Steve Rogers became Captain America, the American super-soldier! For four thrilling years, he struck back at the Axis' treacherous attack — until a freak stroke of fate threw him into suspended animation... to awaken in the mid-1960's, a man twenty years out of his time. Since that day, Captain America has sought his destiny in this brave new world.

Stan Lee PRESENTS: CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON™

EDITED, WRITTEN, AND DRAWN BY: JACK KIRBY • LETTERED AND INKED BY: MICHAEL W. ROYER • COLORED BY: GLYNIS WEIN • ADMIRER BY: A. GOODWIN

TWO POWERFUL SUPER-VILLAINS, TWO OF THE FOXIEST HEROINES EVER, DEFYING THEIR EVIL MACHINATIONS! A WORLD FAMOUS SUPERHERO, WITH PARING AND WIT! AN ANCIENT CASTLE OF NIGHTMARE, WHERE THE SCIENCE OF BIOLOGY HAS RUN AMUCK! CAN ONE ADD MORE TO THIS MOST EXCITING AND EXPLOSIVE SITUATION?? YES!!!

NAZI "X"!



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Jack Kirby, *Captain America* #211, page 1, 1977, Inker: Mike Royer, pen and brush and ink on Bristol board, 15 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein. © and TM Marvel and Subs.

ics function by having panels or bounded boxes that depict discrete actions. Each panel is part of a sequence — the space between each panel is called the gutter, and the mind fills in the relationship between each panel. Comic books lived and died on the newsstand. If a book didn't sell, it was canceled. Comic books, like newspapers, had a short life — they weren't meant to stick around. You consumed them, threw them out, and returned in a month to consume more. The cheapness and vulgarity of the stories cemented their appeal. Lowbrow won the day.

Roy Lichtenstein copied several of Kirby's panels for his famous pop paintings. To Lichtenstein, comics had no authorship and were simply a junk material to be appropriated. He was concerned with the language of modernist painting, not the native context of narrative comics. To think of comic panels in pop paintings is similar to comparing a taxidermied bear to one roaming around in the wilderness: They have two different contexts, and therefore two different meanings. As narrative drawings, Kirby's panels don't operate in the same mode as painting. In the fine-art tradition, looking at paintings is a contemplative act. The combination of material presence, formal elements, and subject matter, not to mention the artist's hand, creates an experience that is meant for meditative viewing.

Original drawings have facture. Comic books do not. Drawing is the bedrock of Kirby's art, however. From the late thirties until his death in 1994, Kirby drew almost 25,000 pages of comics. To conjure the grand opera of violence, he relied on the act of drawing. To draw is such a simple and primal act. Kirby achieved his sublime vision not from large history paintings or epic film or sculpture (though the trace of each of those art forms exists in his comics), but through the flat, junky throwaway art of superhero comics. The best comic books use graphic shorthand to move the eye along the page and through the action. In this way, comics are closer to text. Kirby certainly developed a highly stylized graphic language that was not based on observational drawing. The strength of comics exists between two modes: contemplative and temporal. Kirby's drawings have the ability to be both a striking image and a fast-paced narrative; it makes the most sense to think of his work if you have experienced the narrative aspects first.

That an artist is a storyteller and openly exploits narrative ran counter to avant-garde thinking in the sixties and seventies. Leon Golub saw narrative as an essential and powerful tool for an artist — not something to be chucked for

the sake of media purity. By the time Golub was making his burned and torn giants in his *Gigantomachy* series, even figuration was seen as passé. Overt references to Roman sculpture and painting ran counter to the dominance of abstraction. Like the pop artists, Golub mined a treasure trove of mass-media images, but for very different purposes. Where pop sought a cool and mechanical distance from its subject matter, Golub used those images as kindling for a much hotter painting. By the time he created his *Vietnam* series in the late sixties and early seventies, he had moved away from the dominant concerns of the art scene. Golub dipped into vulgar commercial pictures in a number of ways; his images were culled from periodicals like *Soldier of Fortune* and *Sports Illustrated*. Just at the time Jack Kirby hoped to pull his art form out of the drudgery of the newsstand, Golub was rubbing his paintings in the dirty four-color mud pit. Both artists in their own ways understood the power of vernacular narrative. Golub's paintings flaunt impurity.

When Kirby and Stan Lee were building “the Marvel Universe” in the sixties with characters including the Hulk, Captain America, and the Fantastic Four, it was ad hoc and provisional. It is only in retrospect that it became the ground for a long-running “continuity” tended to by fandom. Kirby saved his biggest ideas for when he went to rival DC in 1970 after contract disputes with Marvel. The series now called *Fourth World* introduced a new pantheon of gods and monsters. Kirby began interweaving the stories in a series of somewhat related titles, but *Fourth World* was never finished, canceled after disappointing sales. Read now as a barely coherent saga, it could be considered on par with Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle*. The difference is that Kirby's work was hiding right out in the open on the dirty pathways of commercial art.

Kirby also went on to create characters like the short-lived *OMAC: One Man Army Corps*. *OMAC*, which may have been one of Kirby's most original ideas, was a superpowered one-man army, changed by an all-knowing satellite called Brother Eye into a world peacekeeper. s was meant originally as a version of Captain America in a dystopian future. Throughout *Fourth World* and later series, like his idiosyncratic adaptation of *2001: A Space Odyssey* at Marvel, Kirby mixes brute force and earthbound forms with speculative science and religious questions. I can't help but think of the now-accepted practice of artists relying on sprawling, half-hinted narratives without seeing a bit of Kirby's dendritic approach to unresolved storytelling. That's the thing with Kirby's work — while setting out to create his own top-selling mainstream comics, he



Jack Kirby, *Mr. Miracle* #2, page 1, 1970, Inker: Vince Colleta, pen and brush and ink on Bristol board, 15 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein.

"Mr. Miracle" #2, ™ & © DC Comics. Used with Permission.



THE SCORCHING WASTELAND MOVES INSIDIOUSLY INTO THE CITY,,, MELTING,,,DISSOLVING CONCRETE GIANTS,,,AND THEIR BUILDERS.



EVERY VESTIGE OF MAN AND HIS WORKS VANISHES QUICKLY IN THE WAKE OF THE SPEEDING SHADOW WHO RUSHES TO COMPLETE HIS MISSION!

Jack Kirby, *Silver Star* #6, page 16, 1983, Inker: D. Bruce Berry, pen and brush and ink on Bristol board, 15 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein. *Silver Star* owned by Rosalind Kirby Family Trust.



Jack Kirby, *Silver Star Death* splash, 1983, Inker: D. Bruce Berry, pen and brush and ink on Bristol board, 11 x 17 inches. Courtesy of Glen Gold. Silver Star owned by Rosalind Kirby Family Trust.



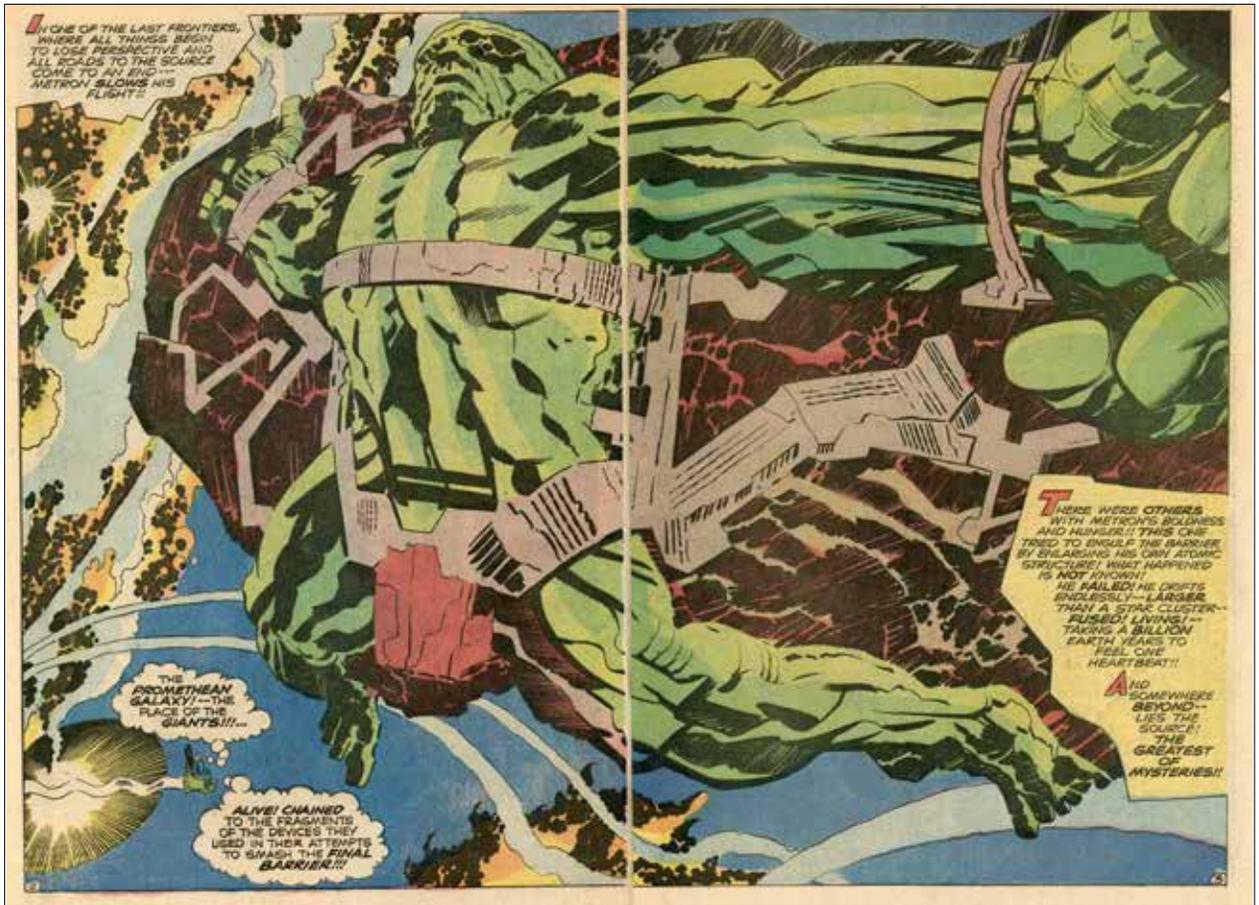
Jack Kirby, *The Hunger Dogs*, page 4, 1984, Inker: D. Bruce Berry, pen and brush and ink on Bristol board, 20 x 15 inches. Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein. From *The Hunger Dogs*, ™ & © DC Comics. Used with Permission.

ended up creating problematic, fragmentary shards of an epic. These pieces probably had more impact unfinished than if he had done something complete and considered. Entering into Kirby's world can be off-putting, but only because the gravitational pull of his drawings are dizzying. You have to tune your ear and eye to his walloping cadences.

Kirby created some of the most enduring fictional characters of the twentieth century. His creations undergird the huge multibillion-dollar corporations Marvel Entertainment and DC Entertainment. Superheroes are the salve of weaklings. The powerless hope to draw down liberation and revenge; they hope to turn the tables on the bastards that terrorize them. Born in Depression-era escapism and elevated to symbols of American exceptionalism during the Cold War, superheroes are the pulp inheritors of the heroic tradition. His best stories deal with this ambivalence between strength and weakness. Kirby himself possessed very little actual power. The corporations that employed him took advantage. His former creative partner Stan Lee still receives top billing and (sometimes exclusive) credit for characters clearly created by Kirby. He worked page-rate to page-rate in order to survive. The medium he worked in was mostly considered trash.

There is the kind of power Kirby drew down — power to bring a private vision into the public realm — and then there is the power of money and all that confers onto an object. Part of Kirby's power derives from its vulgarity. I mean that in the best of terms. Vulgar is democratic. When an art form comes up from the gutter, it brings some of its stink with it. As a contemporary-art audience, we are torn between a desire for authenticity and the comfort of sanitized viewing. Institutions are necessary to frame, promote, and perpetuate their philosophical charges. But an institution's priorities quickly turn to self-preservation by enacting orthodoxies and dogmas. Institutions are simply tools, and the danger with every tool, as Kirby's best stories remind us, is its propensity to dictate to the human, and not vice versa. Art needs its native context to stay genetically healthy, but it also needs the frame of the museum and the academy — otherwise it may just be rumor and conjecture. The stink of the gutter is most acute when transferred to the hushed marble halls of art institutions.

Kirby becomes easier to consider in a larger arena because his native context is dying. Once a technology is no longer viable for the daily market, it can be fetishized and elevated to high art. Even as comics and graphic novels enter into a rich, flowering maturation, the cultural and commercial context Kirby



Jack Kirby, Two-page spread from *New Gods* #5, 1971, newsprint, Inker: Mike Royer. From "New Gods" # 5 TM & © DC Comics. Used with Permission.

worked in is all but gone. Comics aren't sold on newsstands anymore. In fact, newsstands are rapidly disappearing. Printed media is in flux. Comic-book pamphlets that carry on Kirby's characters' stories limp along as vestigial objects sold in specialty stores. An aging newsprint comic does contain objectness — the faded printed color, the feel in the hand, and the sensual action of reading a paper book are all part of the physical experience. All images are physical. Even the most fugitive digital creation relies on the hard physicality and scale of the thing that transmits it. In Kirby's case, that transmitter is crappy, unstable newsprint.

GOLUB

fallen warrior



Leon Golub, *Fallen Warrior*, 1968, acrylic on canvas, 64 x 83.5 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/Courtesy of Stephen Golub and
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Leon Golub, *We Can Disappear You #7*, 2001, acrylic on linen, 25 x 20.5 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and
Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

“I want my paintings to be open to the things that go on in the world today. I want them to be porous — porous things absorbing the detritus of the present.

Physical force is used against victims, and a photograph of such events, say, from San Salvador, records things as they occur and provides at least a partial construction of a social formation. And I hope my paintings do that also.” ⁴

Leon Golub, in an interview with author Jon Bird

Leon Golub spent a long part of his career on the margins of the art world. His paintings were respected and noted, but never loved. It could be because he revealed a rotten world whose stench is right under our noses — a world we fund and go along with. He resisted the detached aspects of modernism, whether that was in the guise of abstract expressionism or pop or minimalism. He wasn't critiquing the institution while being enriched from those same institutions, but he was no populist street artist either, making political art that has the shelf life of fresh fish. Golub's paintings threaten and menace. As soon as you squirm uncomfortably, they give you a leering wink of complicity. The world of Golub's paintings is one of brutality. Bullies stalk the canvases, bringing the viewer into their dangerous games. Golub was a painter engaged in the history of painting and was an astute reader of the art scene. He occupied an uncomfortable space in which he pulled classical tropes into contemporary painting, fine art into cheap mass media, and unvarnished images of power into the cozy enclave of the museum. Above all he believed that art possessed potency, and he worked against the interests that would sap it of its power.

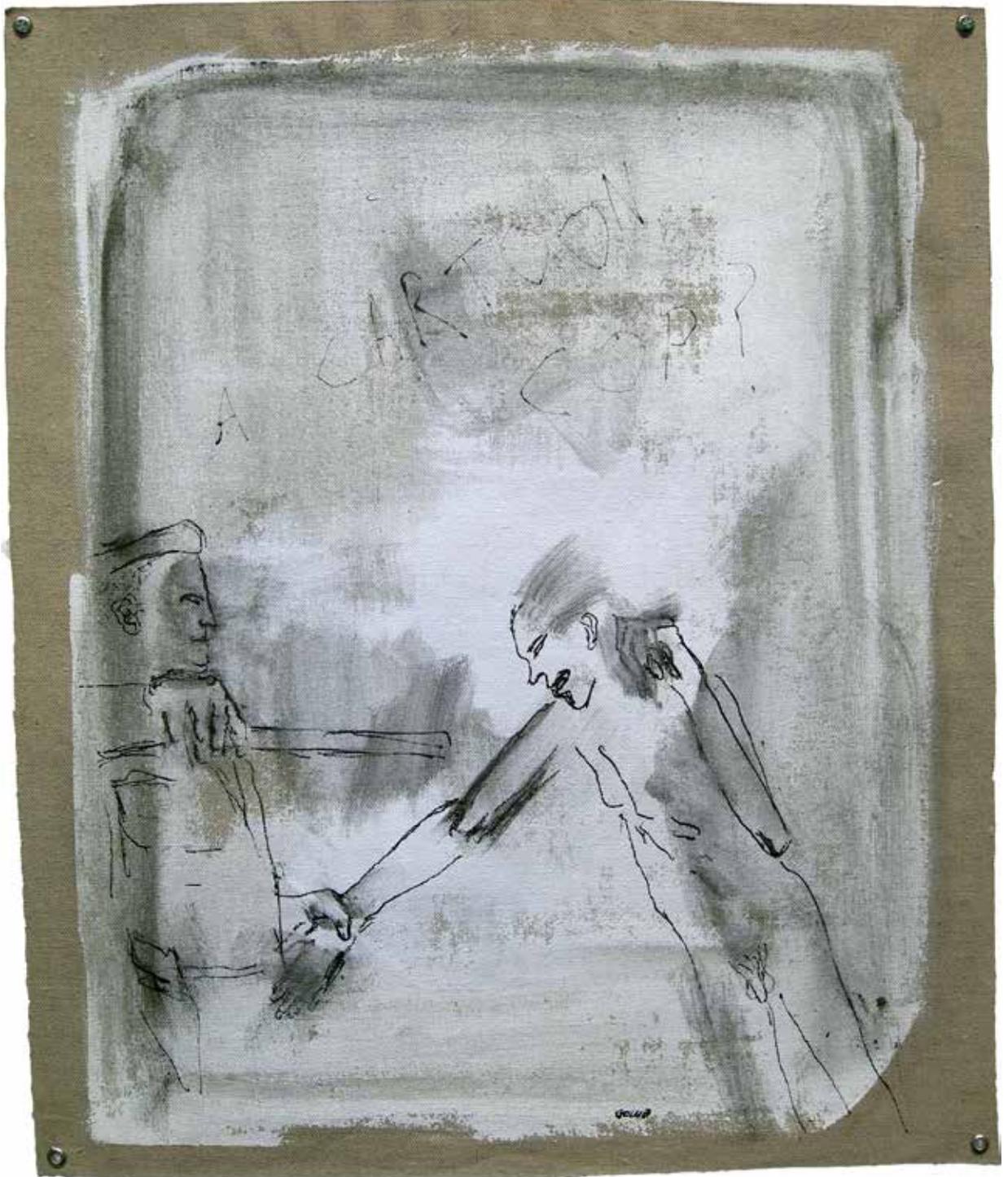
“This could be you! We could disappear you!” These phrases call out from Golub's late small paintings. They premiered at Documenta 11 in 2002. They mimicked the posters of the missing plastered on walls and telephone poles all over New York City after September 11. Instead of pleas for the return of lost loved ones, these messages come from the shadows of power. The paintings have the scratchy urgency of graffiti. *We Can Disappear You #9* shows a woman being dragged by a bare-chested man while another leers at the victim.

The words “this could be you” are stamped in red across the top. The painting is a warning. A warning from whom remains to be seen. The nervous lines suggest etching, which inevitably invites comparison with Francisco Goya’s print suite *The Disasters of War*. Is the warning a threat from shadowy militants to a cowed populace? Is the warning to the citizen whose rights are about to disappear, for them to fight back?

Certainly in 2002 amid the fear following the 9/11 attacks, reactionary forces moved quickly to tamp down free speech. In another of this series, *A Yellow Form*, a woman lying prone with her dress ripped off looks fearfully at a yellow box surrounded by black marks. The marks could have been made by Piet Mondrian or Robert Motherwell. The faces of grinning males float in the white ground. The painting shifts the focus of the larger series from the direct appeal of street posters to a comment on the relationship between a particular brand of abstract art and real-world macho brutality. Golub’s late paintings have a biting sense of humor filled with satiric phrases and commentary on art history. With sarcasm he mocks the art world, political power brokers, and himself.

This late series gets to the heart of what makes Golub’s paintings tick. The paintings in “We Can Disappear You” are not actual street posters. They borrow the familiar language of mass media in order to lull the viewer into an uncomfortable space, but in the end they are paintings, and as such exist in the arena of art history. This is no nitpicking semiotic wordplay about art and the real world. If art is to have any relevance, any power at all, it must operate in a different space from the day-to-day. On the other hand, Golub insists it can’t disappear into some utopian monastery, either. It must be an irritant to the daily in order to make sense of the inchoate images we ingest constantly. The native context of a media image—the newspaper, nightly newscast, or website—is somewhat invisible. We absorb these pictures into our subconscious through the pores of broadcast media. A painting (or any piece of art) might look like that mass-produced image, but it is not the same thing. When it is at its best, the work of art formalizes a thing and puts it into a new context. This new context is a place of contemplation. In Golub’s case it acts as a resister to the image in its native context. It girds a viewer—implicating them, too, for being part of the same matrix—to recognize what is at work beneath the images we take for granted.

The heroic tradition of the West stems from classical images of idealized bodies. Perfectly formed figures stood in for classical ideals in Greek sculpture.



Leon Golub, *A Cartoon Cop?*, 2001, acrylic on linen, 23.75 x 20 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and
Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Leon Golub, *Interrogation I*, 1980-81, acrylic on linen, 120 x 176 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/
Courtesy of The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica.

A nude figure holding a caduceus was understood as Hermes and all that he represents, for example. A laurel wreath indicated Apollo, and a big lug in a lion skin was Heracles. The historic was subsumed into the mythic because both were seen as one in the same. In Homer's *Iliad*, historic grievances are presented as extensions of the gods' own petty infighting. Warriors fight and die poetically. The Roman use of this tradition stressed the militaristic and the political. The rape of the Sabine women, a popular subject among artists, is taken from *The Aeneid* — Virgil's propagandistic answer to *The Iliad* — and glorifies the complete destruction of an indigenous village in the name of empire.

Europe from the Renaissance on reclaimed this heroic lineage; each wannabe Western empire did some version of the Roman heroic tradition. Massive canvases retelling victories by Admiral Nelson or Napoleon or George Washington made bids for their respective empires. As one moves through the centuries, the equestrian statues, battlefield paintings, and busts of great men move from the mythic to the fat and forgettable. Dukes and merchants supplant Apollo or Neptune. By the twentieth century, the great heroic tradition was doomed to kitsch. Proximity to conservative nationalistic movements sullies the tradition of monumental war memorials; the old neoclassical workhouse looks fusty and irrelevant next to forward-thinking, utopian modernism. The heroic tradition as we have inherited it is not about doubt but martial exuberance. Modernism—the great hope of a universalist, humanist future, as Golub has pointed out—carries its own seeds of totalitarianism. Golub saw the tendency of modernism for utopian social change as potentially dangerous. He mined the midden pile of heroic traditions as an antidote to the ever-present commercial banality of modernism.

Golub's technique in the fifties and sixties involved scraping off freshly brushed-on paint with a meat cleaver and loading lacquer onto massive canvases. His naked figures were ugly and blunt. With titles like *Burnt Man* and *Fallen Warrior*, he inverted the heroic Roman ideal of the human figure. Male bodies were charred and bloated, desiccated almost beyond recognition. As the Vietnam War escalated, Golub turned from images of generalized violence to directly quoting the media transmissions of the time. This move made his already aggressive paintings that much more confrontational. The early versions of his seminal *Mercenaries* series depict the shift from overt militarism to a covert secret war waged by mercenaries (many of them trained in Vietnam). In Golub's paintings of mercenaries milling about in an undisclosed Latin American

country, we see the direct successors of nineteenth-century Indian fighters of the American West.

The image of the mercenary is a version of the lone cowboy, his morality guided by blunt utilitarianism and an unwavering belief in personal gain. The symbol (particularly in movies and mass-market paperbacks) is one of redemptive violence: The cowboy is honorable. He does what he must. Often what he must do for honor is kill. Killing makes him a man. Popular action movies depict the taciturn antihero as one who must break the law to uphold a higher, more immutable mandate. Bureaucracy and federal laws are often equated with weakness — community mores, women, and minorities. The problem with movie action heroes is that they tend to be white Protestants. They generally have brusque, single-syllable names that complement a brusque, anti-intellectual demeanor. Being a Jewish intellectual from Chicago (city of big shoulders) is no way to become a cowboy, nor a flamenco-loving Greek potter, nor a Jewish cartoonist who spends his days in a basement drawing men in tight costumes.

The very idea of masculinity or whiteness as subjects unto themselves is possible only because of feminism and multiculturalism. The first major acts of the Western narrative present white males as the central actors in all human experience. Social constructions, like art forms, in their native contexts tend to be invisible because they are the norm. It takes the right question to reveal the construct behind natural “fact.” Once identity is understood as a social construction, masculinity becomes just another set of social signifiers. Golub’s work is decidedly masculine — in subject matter, scale, and material handling, with a deliberate primitive awkwardness. This output was an avowed critique of the idea that being a man meant wielding force and will on the world. Golub’s men were cartoons and caricatures drawn from the ether of mass media. His paintings undermine images of heroism. Neither coolly ironic nor theatrically macho, Golub’s work points to a more complex model of masculinity.

Whiteness and power are very much at play in Golub’s work. America may claim to be a classless society (it’s not), but race cannot be ignored as defining Americanness. Golub, Kirby, and Voulkos represent a different kind of male image. Imagine Seymour Levov, the Jewish protagonist of Philip Roth’s novel *American Pastoral*. Levov represents a Jewish hope of assimilation. “The Swede,” as he’s called, tries to expunge his “ethnic” particularities. He tries to move as close as possible to an American Protestant ideal. Tall, blond, and athletic (the Nazis liked this type, too), the Swede is the opposite of what is seen as the ethnic



Leon Golub, *A Yellow Form*, 2003, acrylic on linen, 20.5 x 19.25 inches
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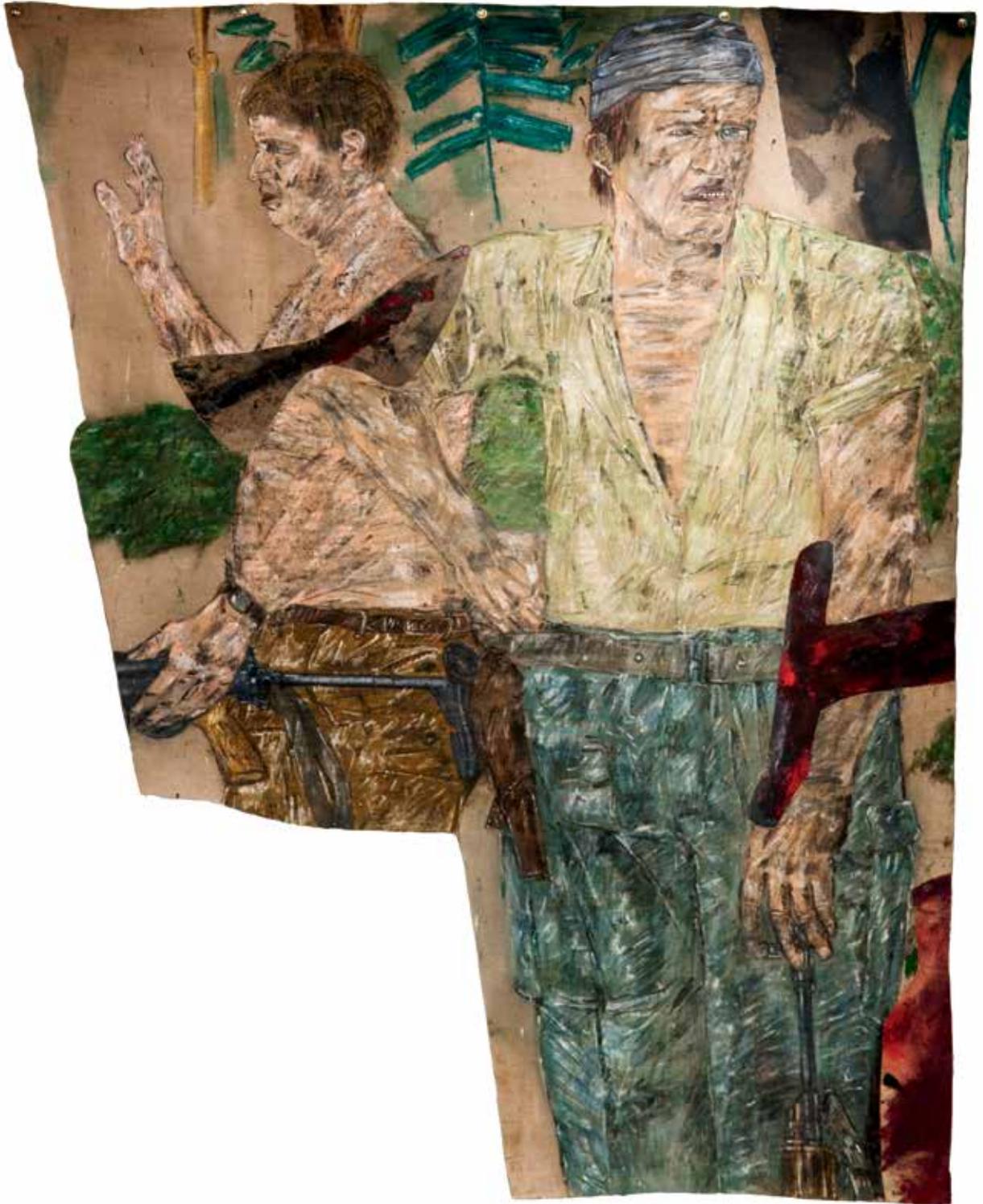
Leon Golub, *Napalm (II)*, 1969, acrylic on linen, 114 x 176 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/
Courtesy of The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica.

traits of the Jew, or for that matter the Greek, Italian, Puerto Rican, or, especially, black person. Their work comes out of a muscular, working-class sensibility. Golub's men live under the pristine skin of the Swede's idea of American masculinity. They are brutes and sociopaths. They are the trolls that work at the behest of upstanding American businessmen. The cleaver Golub uses to scrape away the paint surface strips away the shiny, polite skin of American life to reveal its violent underbelly.

Golub worked in opposition to many things. He sought a position that went against the grain. Famously, he worked in opposition to abstract expressionism. Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning led the way to showcase an art that was unbounded, modern, and purely about self-expression. Abstraction was a willful disengagement from the world; the art that was understood as most important at the time was mythic, self-reflexive, and free of narrative. Figurative art was seen as hopelessly provincial or a vestige of European decadence. Pollock, the poster boy for the new movement, wore bib overalls, looking more like a rancher than an urban effete. Like his onetime teacher Thomas Hart Benton, Pollock projected an image of Western rugged individualism.

Golub went another way. Chicago was his crucible, not New York. During the fifties, he and wife-collaborator Nancy Spero went to Paris, which was considered dried up and irrelevant when all the energy seemed to be centered in NYC. Upon their return to the U.S., Golub and Spero moved to that center. Golub was out of step with the ab-ex crowd. He was no stubborn traditionalist, however. One fundamental of abstract expressionism was important to him. Painting is not just a window into another world; it is a physical thing, and Golub treated his canvases as such. Besides using a cleaver to scrape the paint into the fiber of the canvas, he showed his canvases unmounted and torn so they had shape and objecthood. This materiality, combined with anachronistic classical references, gave Golub's paintings heft and force. A viewer can understand a Golub painting as either some lost remnant from the Herculaneum or a very contemporary attempt to break painting of old habits.

Voulkos' theft from abstract expressionism was similar. Like Golub, he took the monumentality and surface violence of Jackson Pollock's paintings and transmuted them into pottery form. Less overt than Golub, Voulkos took classical motifs and forms and camouflaged them in his large-scale vessels.



Leon Golub, *Mercenaries II, section I*, 1975, acrylic on linen, 102 x 60 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/Courtesy of Stephen Golub
and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Golub constantly elbowed against the politeness of the art world, even as that world espoused creative freedom. “Criticality” is a term tossed around by academics and art writers to describe the activities of many current artists; it suggests critical distance from mainstream institutions. But contemporary art offers very little disruption of mass media. Contemporary art is complicit; it has a mandate to absorb real revolution so as to perpetuate itself. Art institutions often operate like (and alongside of, and at the behest of) corporate capital. The market has a couple of ways to quiet a loudmouth. One is absorption via canonization, the other is to completely ignore it. Golub has gained canonization in the past two decades, but what has that done to the reception of his work? Think of the different meanings of being institutionalized — the most immediate reference is the locking away of a lunatic (or someone who is just troublesome). Golub’s works are still troubling on many levels. In order to truly be troubled, we must see them and we must enter them, not allow the narrative of art history to mask our experience. The paintings must stay alive by pushing open the joints between the sanctuary of painting and an ever-present mass media. As Golub once said, “We can’t be naive, [believing] there exist isolated, pure worlds of art, uncontaminated. That’s a belief that’s been imposed, but we don’t have to believe it.”



Peter Voukos, Untitled Drypoint, 1997, drypoint etching, 22.5 x 15 inches
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voukos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.

VOULKOS

trial by fire

The legend of Pete Voulkos tells of an existential cowboy potter who moved from Montana to California and ran roughshod over the manicured meadows of the craft movement. He was the pioneer American artist — all self-expression and unmediated nature. He pushed pottery into the rough-and-tumble precinct of abstract art. Voulkos as a teacher worked next to his students, a cohort of mostly hard-drinking, hardworking men. As Voulkos has said of this period, “That’s the way I taught, by not teaching.”⁶ He self-consciously projected an image of the transcendental artist that reaches apotheosis through raw material. He was a man of action, not words. This legendary Voulkos spawned an army of cigar-chomping, misogynistic imitators that made big dumb pots. The history of the California clay movement puts Voulkos as the Zeus at the apex of a pantheon of academically connected artists. Voulkos cultivated this legend as the years went on. The small circle that maintains his legacy repeats the legend vociferously.

Truth resides in the legend, but it blunts Voulkos’ real achievements. He has never been fully embraced into the larger continuity of contemporary art; he is seen either as a provincial phenomenon or a craft artist that doesn’t warrant inclusion in a wider art history. Mostly, he’s seen as just that — history — with not much to offer the present. For ceramic artists, he’s a black hole whose gravity needs to be escaped. For others he’s an unknown quantity. His legend keeps his work constrained. I’d like to put the legend aside and bring his work into the present.

There are a few ways to think about ceramics. One would be to consider only the finished product. In this view, the quality of the object is judged on surface and form. It is an autonomous thing; process doesn’t figure into the equation. Skill and completeness arbitrate aesthetics. Put simplistically, this view constitutes what is considered “craft” as distinct from “art.” Another way of thinking about ceramics is through material process. Ceramic art contains a number of very potent metaphors. Clay is earth. Clay begins as a malleable material that

records each touch, but when subjected to high temperatures becomes hard as stone. Metamorphosis defines ceramics. Voulkos understood these metaphors implicitly. He strove to tromp over the politeness of the craft movement by stressing process, tension, and monumentality over balance, finish, and a humble scale. The legend maintains this image of a gate-crashing wildman. His later work says otherwise.

Voulkos was a performer. Maybe it's the nature of ceramics to produce in a workshop setting, or maybe it's Voulkos' outsized personality, but he could only work onstage. From the time he began teaching until his years doing traveling workshops, Voulkos created for an audience. He had an instinct for the primal aspects of pottery making. Watching a hollow form rising from a wet lump of clay on a spinning wheel is mesmerizing. Voulkos compared working with clay to dance. For a time he immersed himself in flamenco music, absorbing that rhythm into his work. Voulkos fed off the audience as he threw huge forms out of seventy-five pounds of clay. In his later years he preferred finishing his work in a huge, Japanese-style wood-fired kiln called an anagama. An anagama climbs up a hillside and terminates at a long stack, looking like a brick dragon. Stoke holes dot its ribs. An anagama's location on the upward slope of a hill takes advantage of the natural flow of heat. The kiln requires several cords of wood to be fired over a week, reaching temperatures of 2,300 degrees. The firing inscribes the movement of flame and heat on the pot. The whole process of throwing, shaping, paddling, and fire amounts to one huge material performance; the malleable clay becomes a document by recording every mark.

In 1953, Voulkos spent a summer teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Black Mountain transformed the artists and writers that attended in the way an anagama alters pots. John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg were among the luminaries who left Black Mountain completely changed. Karen Karnes, the resident potter, invited Voulkos to teach. Karnes was well known for her quiet, contained vessels. Voulkos and Karnes represent a dichotomy similar to Walt Whitman's and Emily Dickinson's in American poetry. As the heavy-browed, physically driven barbarian, Voulkos inherited Whitman's open-shirted wildness; Karnes' meditative, keen intelligence was similar to Dickinson's introspection.

Voulkos was shaped by his working-class Greek upbringing in terms of his ability to adapt to any situation, but Black Mountain blew open his natural pragmatism. He absorbed the lessons of choreographer Merce Cunningham and



Peter Voulkos, Untitled Plate, 1991, wood-fired stoneware, 5 x 20.5 inches diameter
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.

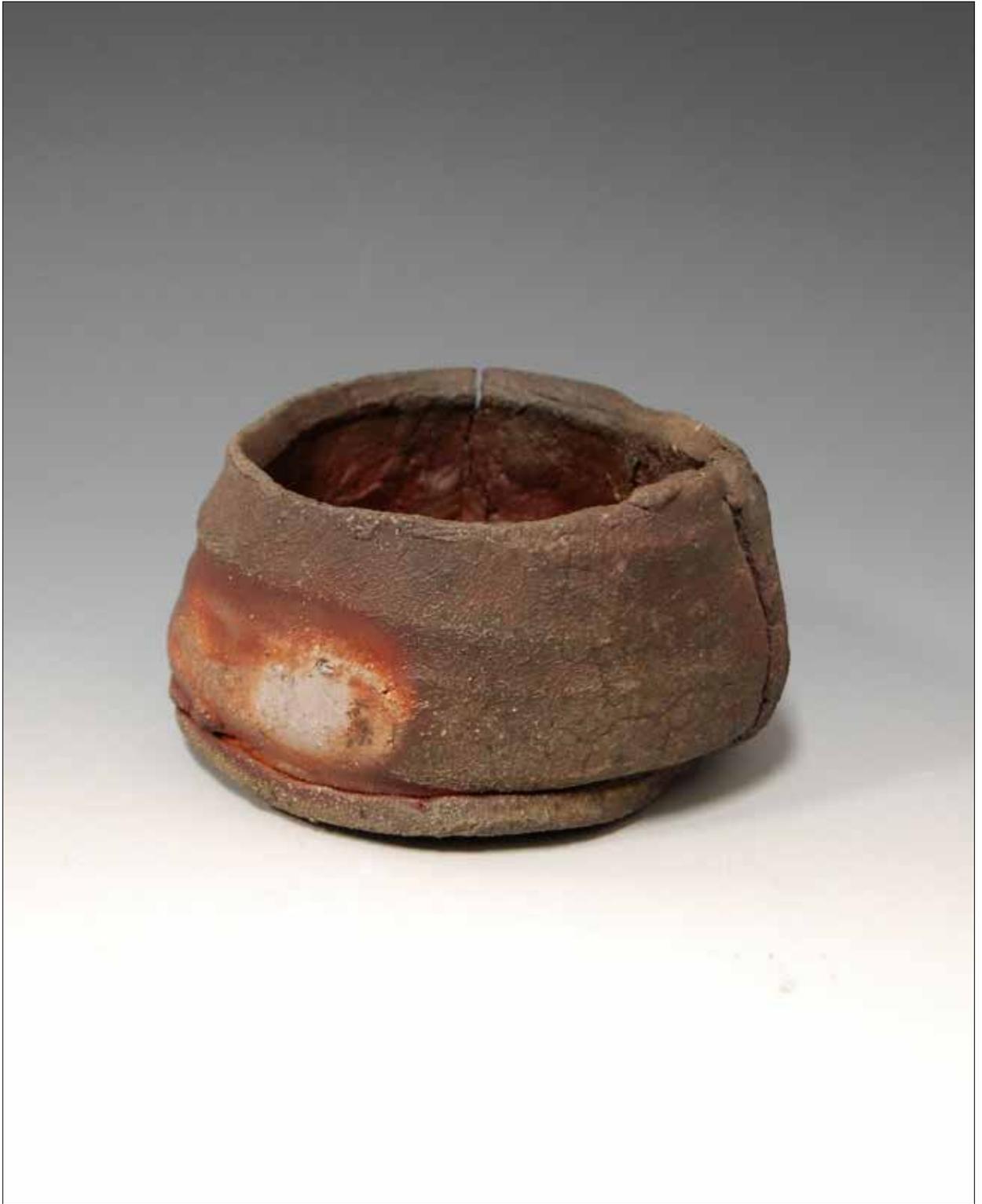
John Cage's experimentations with chance. Black Mountain gave birth to a particular kind of avant-garde that favored experience over intellection and process over the finished object. On that same trip, Voulkos went to New York City and hung out at the Cedar Tavern, where he met abstract expressionist painter Franz Kline. The year Voulkos was on the East Coast, Allen Ginsberg had just begun writing *Howl* and Jack Kerouac had just written *On the Road*. Voulkos took all these lessons back to California and started an MFA in ceramics at Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis Institute).

Voulkos' association with Black Mountain College burnished his legend as the Prometheus that brings freedom and fire to the staid craft of pottery. Historical narratives are useful inasmuch as they shape otherwise disconnected facts. The distance from a generative story that gives shape and meaning to an encyclopedia entry is short, however. To view Voulkos as a lone hero devalues both his own contributions and those of other lesser-known artists. The activities of Black Mountain were part of a larger postwar trend to seek models outside of the Western historic perspective. A growing interest in Eastern philosophy and renewed consideration of art from so-called "primitive" cultures affected many artists and writers of the period. Voulkos has stated that, besides Picasso's ceramics, Japanese Haniwa figures, Olmec heads, and ancient Greek amphorae formed the basis of his vocabulary. Voulkos benefited from a social network of West Coast potteries that began during the Depression. The West also provided an openness that disregarded entrenched Western traditions while keeping an ear open to Asia and indigenous North America.

Voulkos the wildman epitomized the romantic view of the artist as a primitive savage in direct contact with the transcendent. "Primitive" is a loaded and problematic term; it's often used as a pejorative meaning backward, superstitious, and unreasonable. Colonial power is based on the categorizing of some cultures as primitive and others as civilized. "Primitive" is often lumped together with art by children, the insane, and "visionary" unschooled artists. The label invites hostility because it highlights the position of white, academically trained men as the apex of artistic achievement. Far below the pinnacle are browner societies and women. The list of what constituted high art when Voulkos was getting started was short: No pottery, weaving, dance, or comic books. That was craft, women's work, and juvenilia. Voulkos certainly aspired to the pinnacle, but he chose a medium that, no matter what form it takes, was considered less than. The East Coast establishment pegged Voulkos as either



Peter Voulkos, *Untitled Plate*, 2000, wood-fired stoneware, 7.75 x 20.5 x 21.5 inches
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.



Peter Voulkos, Untitled Tea Bowl, 1993, ceramic, 4 x 6 x 6 inches
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.

a “ceramic” artist or a “California” artist – never just an artist.

Primitivism is also associated with authenticity and directness. It is this meaning of the term that is useful in describing all the artists in this exhibition. Primitive in this sense is potent. In American thought there is a long tradition of primitivism being a conscious resister to a superficial commercial culture. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s and Henry David Thoreau’s writing had extreme influence on American political and spiritual thought. The composer Charles Ives is referred to as an American “primitivist” because he sought inspiration in profane sounds. Emerson, Thoreau, and Ives were intellectuals. They understood their desire to have a direct communion with the world as a conscious and metaphoric act. Artists who take this stance are often considered phonies for not completely living up to some impossible standard. This misses the point. It’s the followers you have to watch out for. They’ll muck up the message by becoming zealots based on a wrongheaded reading. Primitive could also be aligned to the vernacular.

In the post-World War II period, artists, writers, and thinkers sought a more inclusive art that worked against the hegemony of Christian capitalism. “Primitive” as a metaphor is present in many other non-Western situations. The Japanese tea ceremony and the aesthetic born from it exemplify metaphorical primitivism. Loosely thrown and crustily glazed, a tea bowl is rough and unassuming. The tea bowl aesthetic derives from tea masters who observed Korean peasant rice bowls. The native context of the rice bowl was one of everyday poverty. Korean potters made the bowls quickly as part of the daily economy. The Japanese turned unconsciousness into a manner. An aesthetic grew out of a Zen Buddhist belief in primitive purity. When Japanese potter Shoji Hamada toured the United States in 1952, he introduced Voulkos to an entire aesthetic based in Japanese country pottery. Zen Buddhism played an important role at Black Mountain College as well. Zen Buddhism, like transcendentalism, relies on direct experience over institutional validation. It isn’t difficult to understand that both philosophies might lead to an interest in ancient art, other “primal” cultures, and technological simplicity to achieve a frank openness.

Voulkos’ brand of primitivism isn’t a self-imposed technological limit, however. He was pragmatic to the core. When in Montana he dug clay because there was no other access and it was free. When in California he thought it was pointless to continue digging clay if it was commercially available. He worked with ceramic engineers to design some of the biggest gas-fired reduction kilns on



Peter Voulkos, Untitled Ice Bucket IB5-1/5 (CR 492.IB5-1/5-B), 1998, bronze, 16.75 x 22 x 21.5 inches
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.

the West Coast at the time. He used whatever was on hand. He never fetishized glaze chemistry, as often happens in ceramics, nor was he fussy about clay bodies. Part of using the anagama was an effort to allow the kiln to work on the surface of the clay, as it had a directness that matched his clay handling.

Voulikos was primitive in the manner of Woody Guthrie. Guthrie did actually live through the Dust Bowl, but a big part of Guthrie the legend was an act. It is only now that we are able to see beyond the façade of the troubadour of the people. Voulikos the legend wasn't a lie, but it was in large part a performance. The problem with legends, just like canonization, is that they flatten the perception of the work. Another pitfall of clinging to the legend and not the work itself is that legends tend to make institutions. Institutions instantly become a mediator between the viewer and the work. Suddenly the very thing that was resisted in the first place is created anew.

Potters work serially. A production potter (something Voulikos did early on to support himself) makes pots in a series. A production cycle includes multiples of single forms. The goal of production is direct engagement with the market. Potters tend to settle into a reduced vocabulary of forms and glazes to fit the economics of a design line. This model influenced studio potters, who tended to work more like painters in that they made series of the same forms, but were still making discrete stand-alone objects. Voulikos is no exception. In the last couple of decades of his life, Voulikos focused on a handful of forms. All those forms are represented in this show — stacks, platters, ice buckets, and tea bowls. The plates in the show are indicative of his later work. They have rugged handling and minimal, sgraffitoed drawings on the surface. The ash glaze from the anagama provides a warm, earthy surface. Except for their scale, these plates wouldn't be out of place in a Japanese household. The platter that has the most "Voulikosness" seems to be falling apart in front of our eyes; its thick shards are torn off like geological plates and reassembled. The platter, like the ice bucket, appears to be the remnant of some tectonic activity. Voulikos' ceramics are deeply haptic objects — the hand is given primacy over the eye. Watching Voulikos work, you could see that his hands were thinking organs. His breakout sculptures at Otis were huge accretions of thrown forms overlaid with spots of bright enamel paint. The stack is a descendant of those large sculptures; it owes as much to ceramic history as to forward-thinking abstraction. Voulikos talked about the Greek amphora as a model for these forms, but one could see industrial smoke stacks as well as Japanese funerary jars in their DNA.

Craft is often dismissed as naive, uptight, or not very intellectually rigorous. Voulkos went out of his way to shake up the craft world. Granted, the craft movement, especially at mid-century, tended toward conservatism. The traditionalist tendencies inherent in craft make for some grumpy harrumphing at hipper, more forward-thinking art forms. But craft is not dumb, nor is it static. The separation between the two modes of working is an industrial Western problem. Many craft thinkers sought a more fertile context for art making than the white box of the commercial gallery. Craft opened up a space for women and minorities to work. For a potter, the pot is not simply an object standing aloof (although its formal qualities as a contemplative form are essential), but a thing in time and motion. It lives on a table or in the home, full of flowers. If it isn't directly in use, it carries those metaphors in its form and material. Craft tends to enter the marketplace directly — bypassing the old-boy network of blue-blood money that characterizes the collection of fine art. In this sense, craft pottery is closer to Jack Kirby's commercial world of newsstand comics. For the craft artist, an important aspect of the work exists in the field of daily time and use. Voulkos may have strove to create an art modeled on the painting of the abstract expressionists, but his practice was deeply rooted in craft thinking. In this time in which social practice and performance dominate the art world and artists regularly cross over into design and craft, we can finally fully appreciate Voulkos. His oeuvre makes more sense as a dynamic body of work than as a collection of discrete objects.

What conjoins an interest in the primitive as well as the pragmatism of craft is a desire to locate art within a different temporal sensibility. Modern and postmodern art rely on a very specific historical reference. In so doing, an entire 10,000 years of human artistic activity is disregarded. Modern art set up the expectation that art exists outside the corrupting influence of daily time. Modernist critics like Clement Greenberg created a separation between the heroic and the pure and the domestic and the vulgar. Modernism espouses a vision of a pure, unblemished wholeness. The craft movement, the activities at Black Mountain, and generational forays into primitivism sought a different sense of time. An object or an image in daily time morphs and fragments. Such an object is a living thing — it gets tossed around by the currents of a lived life, tumbles, cracks, breaks, and finally metamorphoses into a potent metaphor. The fragment, the crack, and the shard are more reliable containers for ideas than the unblemished, unsullied vessel.



Peter Voulkos, *Mimbres* (CR485.S17-AP2-B), 2000, bronze, 69.5 x 32.5 x 32.5 inches
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.



Peter Voulkos, Untitled (CR 321-Pr), 1999, monotype, 30 x 22 inches
Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.

The fragment as a working model for the artist is perennial. Renaissance artistic ideals were predicated on the incomplete reassembly of classical shards. The difference between Michelangelo's platonic ideal of David, done when he was a cocky twenty-six-year-old, and his late dying slaves done in old age is the difference between a utopian dream of unified vision versus the fragmented experience of the day-to-day. The former leaves no doubt while the latter is steeped in a provisional worldview. Auguste Rodin, following in the late footsteps of Michelangelo, metastasized the fleeting and fragmentary. As monumental as his great works are, he mainly produced fragments of one epic work — the never-quite-finished *Gates of Hell*. Modern art's main branch sought platonic unity. American culture after World War II, thoroughly modernist and commercial, presented a surface of futurist solidarity. Cultural unity proved to be an illusion. Just as the Renaissance crafted an aesthetic of material purity based on the fragments of Roman Empire, American triumphalism created a smooth mask out of cherry-picked history.

All three artists in this exhibition are, in the end, shard artists. The comic panel is a fragment that is glued together to make a story. Like a partially reassembled vessel, readers fill in the missing pieces with their minds. Kirby stitched together his incomplete epics with fragments of monthly installments. Golub understood that the fragment is the presiding image of modern existence—his paintings derive from the understanding that we receive information through shards of media and bits of conjecture. The revelation of the atom taught us that the entire world is made up of small pieces in flux, not distinct whole entities. The shard is a fact of pottery—either as the sole remnant of a fuller vessel or as the remains of failed pots. Almost every pottery had a “shard pile” out behind the kiln where mistakes were laid to rest. Voulkos accentuated the shard in his work and revealed the tectonically ruptured nature of the medium. All three artists used collage at some point (the ultimate in modernist shard art): Kirby used it in some of his panels in order to push the characters into a different psychic space; Voulkos and Golub, both owing some debt to Picasso, utilized it as a means to create jarring, disjointed pictures.

If the artists are all shard artists, they are also artists of the conflagration. The kiln is the most obvious image. The dried clay object is placed into an oven and subjected to white-hot temperatures. The flame tattoos the ware as it transforms brittle earth into vitrified stone. Pottery technology is the beginning of industrial process. As potters got better at refining kilns, they were able to

transform clay and then metal. Voulkos was forged in the craft movement, a movement meant to resist industrialization, but he also fully embraced technological innovation. Jump ahead from neolithic pottery kilns to the military industrial complex and we have the terrible imagery that made up Golub's work — a pantheon of burnt and immolated figures. War burns. The use of napalm inspired Golub's first directly topical work. Kirby's characters were always consumed by unimaginable blasts of energy. OMAC, the One Man Army Corps, is consumed in painful fire before he is transformed into a biomechanical savior. Bruce Banner is bathed in gamma radiation to become the rampaging Hulk. Each artist has in some way conjured scorched earth. There are no half measures.

Kirby, Golub, and Voulkos were each affected by combat and the war of their youth. But are they historical relics? How can we think about them now? We have a whole generation of combat-addled vets returning from dubious wars. At least World War II was openly acknowledged and celebrated. Our current wars are murky at best. What artists are being made by this war? Connected to those wars is a power system that favors money speculation and corporate fiefdoms over true citizenry. The contemporary art market is simply a bauble on the arm of this corrupt system. Kirby, Golub, and Voulkos offer some model for elbowing a space in between the joints of high and low and resistance to orthodoxy. Finally, the art of these three artists in their problematic masculinity, unreconstructed material sensibility, and contradictory stances may be the best model for a vivid art that is truly alive. The things that don't fit, the hybrids and shambling monsters, the white-hot shards of incomplete narrative, create the spaces for a vital, urgent art.

notes

- 1 | Hyde, Lewis. *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- 2 | Schumer, Arlen. *The Silver Age of Comic Book Art*. Collectors Press, 2003.
- 3 | Hatfield, Charles. *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby*. University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
- 4 | Bird, Jon, Jo Anna Isak, Satish Padiyar, and Leon Golub. *Leon Golub*. Turner, 2011.
- 5 | Golub, Leon. *Leon Golub: Do Paintings Bite?* Edited by Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1997.
- 6 | Galusha, Emily, and Mary Ann Nord. *Clay Talks: Reflections by American Master Ceramists*. Northern Clay Center, 2004.
- 7 | Slivka, Rose, and Karen Tsujimoto. *The Art of Peter Voulkos*. Kodansha International (JPN), 2000.



Peter Voukos, Untitled, 1960, ceramic, 13.5 x 8 x 18 inches
Collection of Museum of Contemporary Craft, Gift of Margaret Murray Gordon Estate, 2004.10.03.
Photo: Dan Kvitka

exhibition notes

Fighting Men was my daydream exhibition. Jack Kirby (1917-1994), Leon Golub (1922-2004), and Peter Voulkos (1924- 2002) occupy alternate dimensions. And yet, these three artists most influenced my own art making. Hoffman Gallery Director Linda Tesner asked me about ideas for a ceramic show and I mentioned my desire to see these works face-to-face. Of course it wouldn't fly, I thought; maybe it will simply be an essay. She seized on the idea immediately. Two years later it was a reality. Bringing the artists together required a lot of legwork: Three different art worlds needed to be connected in order to bring the work to Portland.

Each artist is an icon in the art world, but each in a different field. I had an interesting experience in the months leading up to the exhibition opening: I was giving a workshop at the 2012 *Stumptown Comics Fest* in Portland's Oregon Convention Center. I asked everyone in the room who knew Jack Kirby. Every hand went up. I asked if they were familiar with Leon Golub. One or two uncertain hands were raised. Finally, I asked about Peter Voulkos. Not a single hand. The following weekend the Oregon Potters Association held their annual *Ceramic Showcase* in the same space. Had I asked the same series of questions, the results would be exactly opposite. The most exciting prospect of *Fighting Men* is that audience members coming from different cul-de-sacs of the art world are introduced to a larger field of ideas.

We tried to give a picture of the various ways that the images of these artists are manifested. I can't say enough about the physical experience of these works. While the essay and catalog work on a certain level, the presence of their works facing each other in a single room makes the strongest case. Through original newsprint comics, large paintings, casts of ceramics, pots, prints, and drawings the exhibition illuminates the unintended similarities between the artists. The exhibition brings together original works by all three artists but also includes a curated video room by Thomas Phillipson and Andy Blubaugh, and original comics from my own collection.

DD

LEON GOLUB

A Yellow Form

2003, Acrylic on linen
20.5 x 19.25 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

This Could Be You #16

2002, Acrylic on linen
26.25 x 22.5 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

A Cartoon Cop?

2001, Acrylic on linen
23.75 x 20 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

Gotcha!

2001, Acrylic on linen
24.75 x 21.5 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

This Could Be You #4

2001, Acrylic on linen
21 x 21 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

We Can Disappear You #7

2001, Acrylic on linen
25 x 20.5 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

We Can Disappear You #9

2001, Acrylic on linen
19.5 x 26.125 inches
Courtesy of The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub
Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

Interrogation I

1980-81, Acrylic on linen
120 x 176 inches
The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica

Mercenaries II, section I

1975, Acrylic on linen
102 x 60 inches
Courtesy of Stephen Golub and Ronald Feldman
Fine Arts, New York

Mercenaries II, section III

1975, Acrylic on linen
102 x 75 inches
Courtesy of Paul Golub and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

Mercenaries II, section IV

1975, Acrylic on linen
76 x 72 inches
Courtesy of Paul, Samuel, and Michael Golub and
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Napalm (II)

1969, Acrylic on linen
114 x 176 inches
The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica

Fallen Warrior

1968, Acrylic on canvas
64 x 83.5 inches
Courtesy of Stephen Golub
and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Head XI

1963, Acrylic on linen
22.5 x 22.25 inches
Courtesy of Judy Spero and Ronald Feldman Fine
Arts, New York

PETER VOULKOS

Mimbres (CR485.S17-AP2-B)

2000

Bronze

69.5 x 32.5 x 32.5 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Plate

2000

Wood-fired stoneware

7.75 x 20.5 x 21.5 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled (CR 320—Pr)

1999

Monotype

27.75 x 18 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled (CR 321-Pr)

1999

Monotype

30 x 22 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Ice Bucket IB5—1/5 (CR 492.IB5—1/5—B)

1998

Bronze

16.75 x 22 x 21.5 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Drypoint

1997

Drypoint etching

22.5 x 15 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Tea Bowl

1993

Ceramic

4 x 6 x 6 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Plate

1991

Wood-fired stoneware

5 x 20.5 inches diameter

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Plate

1989

Stoneware

4.5 x 19 x 18.5 inches

Courtesy of The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank
Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica

Untitled Plate

c. 1980

Stoneware

3 x 19 x 19 inches

Private Collection

Untitled

1960

Ceramic

13.5 x 8 x 18 inches

Collection of Museum of Contemporary Craft, Gift
of Margaret Murray Gordon Estate, 2004.10.03

Babe the Blue Ox (a.k.a. Tall Bottle)

1954

Ceramic

30 x 7 inches diameter

Collection of Museum of Contemporary Craft,
Oregon Ceramic Studio Purchase, Archie Bray
Foundation, 1954, 1998.54.02

JACK KIRBY

Original Drawings

The Hunger Dogs, page 4

1984, DC Comics

Inker: D. Bruce Berry

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

20 x 15 inches

Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein

Silver Star #6, page 16

1983, Pacific Comics

Inker: D. Bruce Berry

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

15 x 10 inches

Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein

Silver Star Death, splash

1983, Pacific Comics

Inker: D. Bruce Berry

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

11 x 17 inches

Courtesy of Glen Gold

Black Panther #8

1977, Marvel Comics

Inker: Mike Royer

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

17 x 23 inches

Courtesy of Glen Gold

Captain America #211, page 1

1977, Marvel Comics

Inker: Mike Royer

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

15 x 10 inches

Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein

The Eternals #17, page 17

1977, Marvel Comics

Inker: Mike Royer

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

15 x 10 inches

Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein

Mister Miracle #2, page 1

1970, DC Comics

Inker: Vince Colleta

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

15 x 10 inches

Courtesy of Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein

Tales of Suspense, Issue 79 splash

1966, Marvel Comics

Inker: Frank Giacoia

Pen, brush and ink on Bristol board

11 x 17 inches

Courtesy of Christopher Killackey

Hulk #4 Splash

1962, Marvel Comics

Inker: Dick Ayers

Pen and ink on Bristol board

11 x 17 inches

Courtesy of Christopher Killackey

Original Comics

All objects are newsprint.

All comics are 10.25 x 6.875 inches.

Courtesy of Daniel Duford

Silver Star #4, 6

1983, Pacific Comics

2001: A Space Odyssey #2, 3 & 7

1976-1977, Marvel Comics

The Eternals #3, 10, 12, 17

1976-1977, Marvel Comics

Our Fighting Forces Featuring the Losers #154

1975, DC Comics

OMAC: One Man Army #1-4, 7

1974-1975, DC Comics

Kamandi #23, 27

1974, DC Comics

Mister Miracle #7, 11

1972-1973/74, DC Comics

The Demon #2, 3

1972-1973, DC Comics

Forever People #2, 7, 8, 11

1972, DC Comics

New Gods #5, 8

1971-1972, DC Comics

Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen #134, 143

1971 and 1972, DC Comics

Captain America #109

1968, Marvel Comics

The Mighty Thor #145, 146

1967, Marvel Comics

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acknowledgments

It is a rare and wonderful privilege to work with a colleague whose insights pique and hone one's understanding of a particular moment in art history. Guest curator Daniel Duford, artist and faculty member of the Pacific Northwest College of Art, has been such an inspiring collaborator. The concepts buttressing *Fighting Men: Golub, Voulkos, and Kirby* grew out of Duford's investigations pertinent to his own studio practice as a ceramist and illustrator. His insights contextualize ideas about three prominent mid-20th-century American artists whose work would not typically appear together in the same exhibition, but whose works speak volumes about power, authority, and violence. I am deeply grateful that Duford chose to share his vision with the Hoffman Gallery.

I want to express my gratitude to an old friend and respected colleague, Stuart Horodner, artistic director of the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, for his ancillary essay included in this catalog. Horodner has a special gift for assimilating between scholarship, popular culture, and real life. Duford's and Horodner's cogent and pertinent contributions are the sort of art writing I yearn to read.

Tracy Schlapp, designer at Cumbersome Multiples, visualized this publication. Exhibitions are, by definition, limited temporal experiences, but the original concepts purported by *Fighting Men* deserve documentation. Thank you, Tracy, for giving shape to this book.

Fighting Men would not have been possible without the generosity of the lenders to this exhibition. Martina Batan, director of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, made paintings from the Leon Golub Estate available to this exhibition. Vicki Gambill and Maria Coltharp of The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica, made the loan of two major Golub works available to the Hoffman Gallery audience. The Estate of Peter Voulkos and Frank Lloyd of the Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, loaned most of the Peter Voulkos works, along with the Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, and a private collector. Private collectors Glen Gold, Point Reyes; Aaron Noble and Jenette Goldstein, Los Angeles; and Christopher Killackey, Chicago, loaned original Jack Kirby drawings to this exhibition. Original comics illustrated by Kirby were loaned by Daniel Duford.

The artists' rights organization, VAGA, in New York, assisted with copyright permission for the Leon Golub paintings.

Curating any exhibition is a team sport. Special thanks go to Mark Hansen, who edited and helped shape Daniel's essay. Kat Merck provided her astute copy editing skills to the catalog. Thomas Phillipson, Regional Services Manager at the Northwest Film Center, and Andy Blubaugh, filmmaker and faculty member of the School of Film at the Northwest Film Center, curated the video documentaries on view in the Hoffman Gallery during the exhibition. Lise Harwin, Emily Miller, Joe Becker, Deanna Oothoudt, and Michelle Van Orsow of Public Affairs and Communications provided public outreach for this exhibition. Mark Johnson was the lead installation preparator and installed the exhibition along with Susan Griswold, Marian Kidd, and Tyler Rizzo. Nina Olsson, painting conservator, expertly oversaw the installation of the Golub paintings. Patrick Ryall, director of Instructional Media Services at Lewis & Clark, assisted with the ancillary video screenings shown during the exhibition. As always, the Lewis & Clark College Facilities Services crew provided essential assistance. Thank you, Richard Austin, Mike Gipson, Leon Grant, and Brian King.

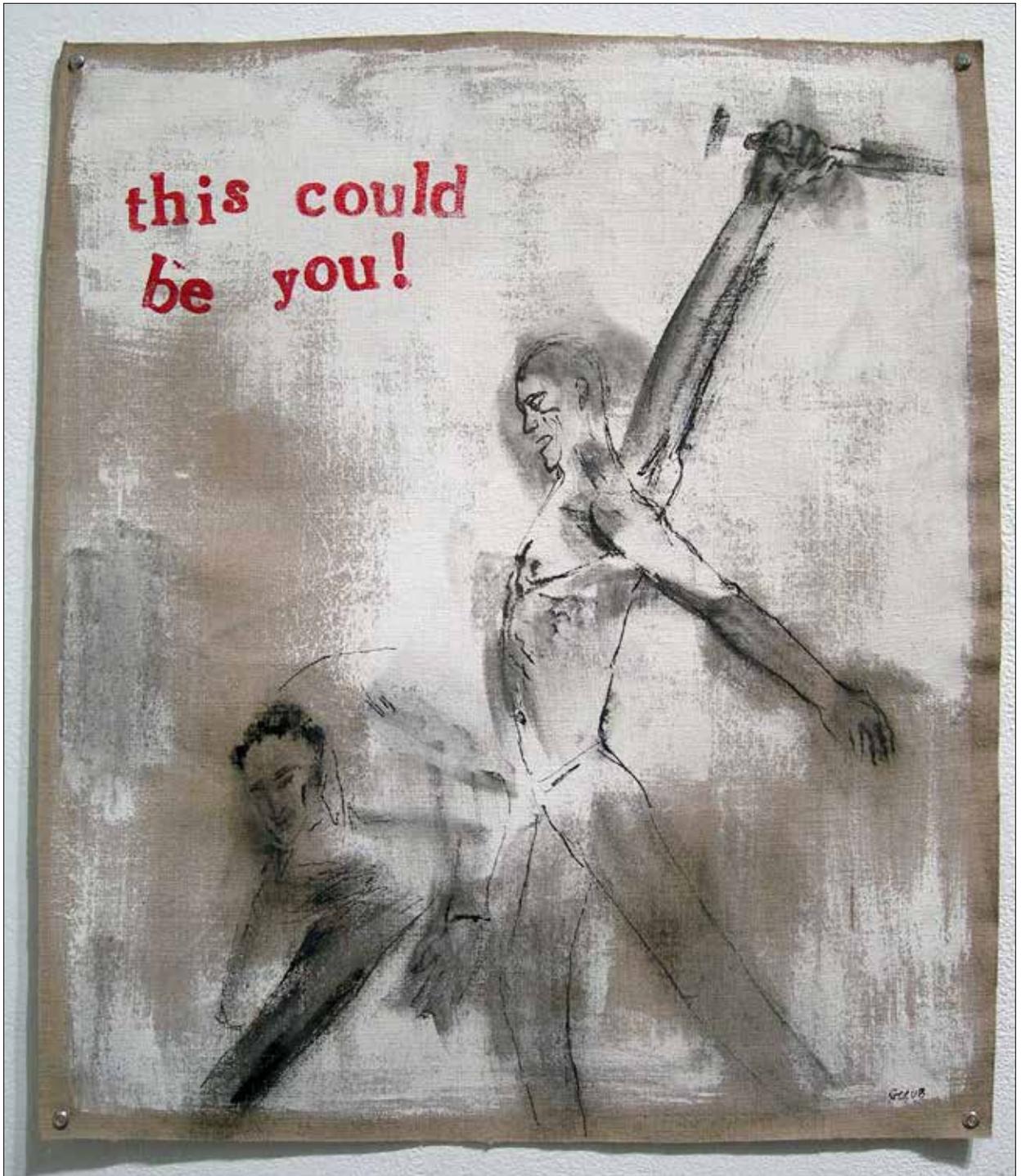
Finally, I am deeply grateful to the Regional Arts and Culture Council for a project grant in support of *Fighting Men*. RACC works diligently on behalf of all visual and performing arts organizations in Portland — our community is extremely fortunate for RACC's advocacy.

LT



Regional Arts & Culture Council





Leon Golub, *This Could Be You #16*, 2002, Acrylic on linen, 26.25 x 22.5 inches
Art © Estate of Leon Golub/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/Courtesy The Nancy Spero and
Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts, and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Jack Kirby (1917-1994), Leon Golub (1922-2004), and Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) occupy alternate dimensions. Their achievements are chronicled in different art histories each with its own priorities. Through original newspaper comics, large paintings, casts of ceramics, pots, prints and drawings *Fighting Men* illuminates the unintended similarities between the artists. Each in his own way, Golub, Kirby, and Voulkos worked in fragments and multiples. The shard and the conflagration are prevailing images running through the works in *Fighting Men*. The comic panel is a fragment that is glued together to make a story. Kirby stitched together his incomplete epics with fragments of monthly installments. Golub understood that the fragment is the presiding image of modern existence — his paintings derive from the understanding that we receive information through shards of media and bits of conjecture. Voulkos accentuated the shard in his work and revealed the tectonically ruptured nature of the medium.

The specter of violence and the consequences of power animate this exhibition. Raw power emanates from the artwork. To watch Peter Voulkos manipulate a huge mound of clay on the wheel and rip and tear at the resulting form is a spectacle of brute force. The sheer strength required of Voulkos to make his work bespeaks of extraordinary physical prowess. Power animated Jack Kirby's superhero comics. His best known and most personal work depicted beings literally crackling with sublime cosmic energy. Golub's large-scale canvases display a similar material chutzpah as Voulkos's vessels, but Golub was also preoccupied with power in another sense of the word. For Golub, power and force were the abiding concerns of his paintings — the misuse of political power and the complicity of the citizen and artist in the power of the state. Of course Kirby's stories may seem to glorify physical and metaphysical force as a means of keeping order but his most personal work always contains ambivalence about power. The artists in this exhibition scratch and grab at the breaks in between disciplines. *Fighting Men* is an apt title because, yes, they do depict fighting and each artist brawls with his recalcitrant medium. More interesting is that they shove against the cubicles of discourse set up by contemporary art institutions.

