

Artforum • Öyvind Fahlström • Elisabeth Wetterwald • 18 April 2002

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The teeming references of Öyvind Fahlström's work have often been reduced to various art trends, such as Pop, agit-prop, or even narrative figuration. It is therefore quite refreshing to see a retrospective, curated by Sharon Avery-Fahlström, Manuel J. Borja-Villel, and Jean-François Chevrier, that respects the complexity of Öyvind Fahlström's work and, above all, recognizes its roots in concrete poetry (he was the author of *Manifesto for a Concrete Poetry*). Another merit of this exhibition is that it demonstrates to what extent he was influenced by musical rather than pictorial material. "One of the universes to be conquered is that of rhythm," he wrote about one of his first works, *Opéra*, 1953, a painting that was presented as a long roll composed of abstract pictographs repeated and developed progressively in relation to the linear reading of the work, like pre-Columbian Mexican manuscripts. Fahlström was also able to integrate geopolitical data and the preoccupations of the American counterculture into his work. Paintings as varied as *The Cold War*, 1964, which represents two panels with interchangeable elements, the East and the West, separated by a fixed and immovable neutral zone (the third world), to *Columns*, 1973, illustrations of pages of newspapers in comic-book fashion marvelously demonstrate the way in which Fahlström fused the local and the global, the micro and the macro, poetic language and political engagement.

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.